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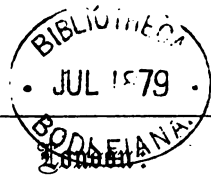
IRENE'S DOWER.

BY

CHARLES DESLYS.

TRANSLATED BY

MRS. GEORGE HENRY.



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IRENE'S DOWER.

CHAPTER I.

THE MAGISTRATE.

THIS is a true story, and dates but of yesterday.

The only condition imposed on me in relating it, was that of naming neither persons nor places.

The scene must be in a verdant, uneven and picturesque country—perhaps, reader, you will prefer your own. Is not that ever the finest?

It is market day. Wares are lying about everywhere, cattle grouped together, and the inhabitants strolling leisurely in every direction.

The market being nearly over, some of the country people belonging to the surrounding villages were returning home, when two men stopped at the door of a comfortable-looking house.

One of them was remarkable for a fine athletic figure and intelligent features. Kindness and strength seemed blended in them. He appeared to be about twenty, his dress was plain, and without the least pretension to fashion.

His companion was an elderly countryman. Constant labour in the fields had bronzed his features and rounded his shoulders. He wore hobnailed shoes, high gaiters, a blue smock frock over his jacket, an oilskin hat, and carried a large stick of cornel-tree fastened to his wrist by a strip of leather. He walked quickly with a sort of feverish haste; his contracted features and the monosyllables constantly escaping from his lips, reveal the irritation, the stubbornness of a man whose patience is worn out, and who will listen to nothing more.

Several times his companion has vainly tried to prevent his going any further. On the door-step he stopped him again, saying with painful emotion—

“ Father, once more, I pray—”

“ Will you give in ? ” gruffly asked the old man.

After a short hesitation, the young man answered in a respectful but determined tone of voice—

“ No, father ! ”

The old man shrugged up his shoulders and walked into the house. It belonged to the magistrate.

M. Morisseau had formerly been a solicitor in a large town, where he might have obtained fortune and fame. The death of a young wife whom he adored, left him a disconsolate widower with an only child, a delicate little girl, who, he had every reason to believe, had inherited her mother's constitution. The dread of a second misfortune made him leave the town, and go and live with his child in this mountainous and healthy country, where he

soon gave himself up entirely to the duties which had been offered to him.

Fifteen years had now elapsed since his arrival there, his daughter was saved, and the esteem and affection which were lavished upon him, fully repaid him for his sacrifice. He was happy, and when his friends tried to awaken his slumbering ambition he merely smiled; but if they attempted to lower his mission and title, he would stop them saying—

“ Where will you find a magistrate whose life is more usefully and better employed? The justice of peace not only conciliates quarrels and guards the interests of those around him, but by his lessons and example he teaches that respect of others and of one's self which forces people to act honourably. Living in the chief town, in constant and direct intercourse with the rural populations, he develops good feelings, suppresses bad instincts, supports weakness, enlightens ignorance, unites families, preaches order and obedience to lawful authority, moderation, equity and morals, as well as justice.”

Once launched on his favourite topic, nothing could stop him. He was once more the lawyer, the advocate of his own cause.

“Before we came,” would he say, “did justice exist for the peasantry? Everywhere privilege and disorder were to be found. How many formalities, how many expenses, how many journeys—lawsuits were everlasting; judges devoid of instruction and independence, living solely on the misery of others, knew so well how to eternise the least law-suit, that the poor countryman, who was obliged to go through five or six different courts of justice to claim his cow or his ewe, could obtain no redress, until the cow, the ewe, and sometimes the owner himself, were dead. Just read some of the briefs of 1789.”

Then Pierre Morisseau would continue thus—

“The Assemblée Constituante, to its eternal glory, with one single stroke, suppressed this anarchy, by directing equality of rights

through law and the unity of the law. It created and placed in every district, at the nearest borough, close to one's home, the justice of peace; a paternal magistrate accessible to all, even to the humblest, who by the disinterested counsels of experience, the authority of good sense, grants to all an economical and prompt justice; true justice for the peasantry. This, the peasant immediately understood; his confidence and esteem have increased our services.

“ Who taught the countryman to understand the benefit of civil laws? Who spreads more efficaciously than we can do, every amelioration, every progress, all wholesome ideas? Who could, better than ourselves, instruct of his duties a people, too often infatuated by its rights, and, by pacifying private interests, contribute to the pacification of the general ones, to the quiet of political passions and social hostilities? My district is certainly not large, but I am its counsellor, mediator, umpire, and friend; here I represent concord, civilisation, law—law obeyed,

loved and living. Can you show me a nobler part? I glory in it, and love it."

Thus spoke Pierre Morisseau; he was now about fifty. His countenance was calm and loyal; his piercing look used to say what he thought; his language was frank, all in him breathed straightforwardness, kindness without weakness, and true satisfaction of an accomplished duty.

On that day his sitting was just over, and his success had been complete. Debtors had shown themselves more just, and creditors less exacting. A brutal husband had sworn never again to beat his wife; a poacher promised not to return to the woods; a drunkard to remain sober; he had put an end to a quarrel of ten years standing between two brothers, so that our magistrate was in the best of tempers when some one knocked at the door.

"Come in," said he.

The old countryman and his son appeared on the threshold.

"Ah! it is Father Froment; come in, pray, and sit down."

Then, shaking hands heartily with the young man, he added, "How do you do, Anthony?"

This mark of sympathy renewed the old man's anger. Until then he had remained near the door, twisting his hat in his hands, for he had not been able to abstain from a little embarrassment.

The audience-room had nothing very imposing. On one side stood a book-case, on the other a great many green pasteboard boxes. Against the walls the map of the department, and a design from the register of lands of the district. Here and there were placed a few chairs dating from the First Empire. In the centre of the room a desk, in front of which the judge seated himself, saying—

"What lucky chance has brought you here? Yours is, no doubt, a friendly visit. You have no law-suit, Froment; no enemies!"

"I beg your pardon, I have one; and if I come to disturb you, M. Morisseau, it is

on important business. Believe me, I am broken-hearted."

"First, let me tell you that honest men like you, Froment, never disturb. Come, what do you complain of? Who is your adversary?"

The old man fell on a seat, and with great anguish, answered—

"My adversary—my enemy—there he is!"

At the same time he pointed to his son.





CHAPTER II.

A VOCATION.

THE young man spontaneously protested against this accusation. He ran to his father, and would have pressed him in his arms, but he pushed him aside.

“Come, no fawning,” said he, “we came here to know who is right—nothing more.”

Anthony turned away, sighing. As to Pierre Morisseau, he could scarcely believe his own ears.

“What!” said he, “your son! with whom you were ever so well satisfied?”

“Formerly; yes, formerly, I was! and that is precisely what makes me so angry now. At school he was one of the most studious and clever pupils. But you must grant, also, I spared neither pains nor money to keep him at college.”

“And he has given you no cause to repent for doing so; his application, his success—”

“Granted,” interrupted the peasant, with some return of pride. “Ah! that was a happy time! he carried off all the prizes, his name was in all the papers; my poor departed wife and myself used to cry for joy in reading them. How differently she would feel to-day!”

“Why?” asked Morisseau. “He has brilliantly finished his studies, he has taken his degree, he is almost a lawyer.”

“What is the use of all that now, if he won't satisfy my just ambition for him?”

“What ambition?”

The old man looked at his son with suppressed indignation.

“Speak, father.”

The parent threw up his arms to heaven, as if calling upon it to witness his son's insensibility.

Pierre Morisseau's looks and gestures proved that he was unable to understand Froment's meaning.

“Have a little patience, sir, you will soon know all. It was at the time of his mother’s death I first began to dread the misfortune that has now fallen upon me. Only fancy, he wanted me then to let him remain at the farm and help me in my labours.”

The magistrate smiled. “That wish does not seem to me unworthy of a good son.”

“What!” exclaimed the father, “surely you don’t imagine I should have spent so much money to make a ploughman of him? No, indeed; I sent him back to town. He had begun studying the law, the least he could do was to go on with it, was it not?”

“I obeyed you, father.”

“Without giving up your hobby!” continued the peasant. “What do you think, sir, was his recreation? He used to go to the farming school and learn agriculture. Just as if that required learning! And then, during the holidays, instead of keeping company with young gentlemen, and honouring me by living like them, he was always in the fields. He studied our soil, and even used to take

some of it back with him in his trunk. Oh ! when he tells me he is perfectly acquainted with all its qualities, I quite believe him. He thinks of nothing else. After having received such an education, oughtn't he to be ashamed of himself ?”

“ You forget, Froment, I am the President of our Agricultural Society,” said M. Morisseau sternly.

“ What !” exclaimed the old man, pushing his chair away from him, “ do you support him in his rebellion ? Oh no ! that is impossible ! Everyone knows you to be a just man, and you are a father likewise. I have nothing to say against your society. It is very good for the instruction of ignorant men, farmers. Anthony shall belong to it when he is a notary. Did you not ask me what my ambition was ? That is it. M. Durand accepts him as his first clerk, and he is to be his successor. We have settled that between us. Such is my determination. If I have exhausted myself with working, if by hard labour I have saved money, it was with the intention that my

son should become a gentleman, and not a farmer, a countryman. And now he refuses me that satisfaction in my old age. He wants to take upon himself the lease of a farm, and, being of age, claims money from me—his mother's property. Don't you think he is very wrong, sir; and won't you make him listen to reason. Come now, pray, decide between us."

"Since you have chosen me for umpire, Froment, you must now allow me to hear what the adverse party has to say for himself. Come, Anthony, it is your turn now."

The young man looked at his father, and said with great feeling, "You cannot imagine, dear father, how much it pains me to grieve you in this way, but I cannot help it. It is my vocation. As long as I thought the idea might pass away when I grew older, I did everything in my power to accomplish your wishes. You have forgotten to state that, by accepting M. Durand's offer, I should engage myself to become his daughter's husband.

She certainly deserves the affection of an honest man. But I do not, and never can love her. Besides, I should make but a poor notary. Our name is Froment (wheat), is not that almost an indication that our duty is to grow corn? Why should I follow another course when I have but to go on straight before me? That road attracts me, I like it. Look at me, father, I am tall and strong. What I require is an active life, and labour in the open air. You speak of ambition—I have mine also. There is as much glory in fertilising the earth as in blackening paper. Cultivation, as it is now understood, as I dream of it, is a science, a noble industry, it gives independence and importance. M. Morisseau will tell you this, as I do. Our district is behindhand; I intend showing the example and enriching it, whilst I am enriching ourselves. Then, I should never leave you. Our labour would be in common. Let me try it. If the experiment does not prove favourable, I will do as you wish me. It will be time, even then. But I am certain I shall

succeed. Believe me, father, you will yet be proud of your son. There lays our future, our happiness."

Anthony was truly grand whilst speaking to his father. His voice thrilled with enthusiasm and confidence, though his eyes were filled with tears. The obdurate old man he implored could scarcely resist his entreaties.

"I must now add more," continued he; "it is now too late to recede. I have been to Paris, and seen M. Maubray, the new proprietor of the estate of Navailles. We have treated for the lease of the large farm which belongs to it."

At this avowal, all M. Froment's anger returned, increased by sudden terror.

"Those lands! that farm!" he exclaimed, "and without my consent! It is madness!"

"The fact is," said Morisseau, "it will be a heavy task."

"I am not so audacious as you suppose me to be," Anthony replied. "M. Maubray is one of the greatest contractors in this

country; he is immensely rich. He had thought of transforming this district himself. My plans, my ideas, have met with his approbation; he will find me in manure, cattle and machinery. All I require is about ten thousand francs. Pray, father, let me have them."

"Never!" exclaimed the old man. "I also will see M. Maubray—"

He was interrupted by the entrance of Miss Morisseau, who was now a blooming girl of seventeen.

"I beg your pardon, father," she said; "I thought you were alone—"

"These gentlemen are friends. You are acquainted with them; M. Froment and his son.

She bowed to them gracefully.

Anthony coloured.

"What do you want, Agathe?" said the magistrate.

"The Marquis de Navailles and his daughter are in the drawing-room."

"I will go to them immediately."

“Father Froment, I must put my decision off for a week. In the meantime you must reflect, and examine the lease. Bring it to me; we will look over it together. If I was Anthony’s father, I should have confidence in him. He might become a great landowner.

“He would make such a handsome notary!” answered the old man.

Anthony was looking at Agathe.

“I must succeed!” he murmured.





CHAPTER III.

OLD ARISTOCRACY.

THE family of Navailles is one of the oldest in France. Lords of the land, they had formerly possessed immense property, which had all disappeared in the great storms of the French Revolution. On their return from the emigration, they had neither castle nor land left them.

The estate had been sold as national property, and belonged to twenty different people. The old castle, fallen in ruins and situated on a wooded eminence, was overrun with ivy and brambles.

Lower down, and on the border of the forest, a sort of farm, flanked with turrets, had alone remained standing. It was called the Manor. This place had formerly been

the residence of the youngest sons of the family; sometimes even that of the stewards. A faithful servant, who had purchased that part of the estate for a few assignats, generously restored it to his masters.

They settled there, after having had the place put in tolerable repair, and during the first years of the restoration lived in mediocrity.

The sons having entered the army, cut an honourable figure amongst the red musketeers. The eldest was killed in a duel; the second son married a rich widow, who died, leaving him all her property. By a second marriage, he restored the family to its former splendour.

This was the present Marquis.

His first intention had been to return to the castle of his ancestors; but the ruins were in such a dilapidated condition, that he was obliged to give up the idea. Besides, it was no longer the fashion to live so near the clouds.

A modern château was built in the valley; a park of one hundred acres of land sur-

rounded it. Nothing was spared to embellish this magnificent residence, where the old nobleman hoped to end his days.

Alas ! the poor man had reckoned without new misfortunes.

His only son, the Count de Navailles, whose prodigalities have become a legend, wasted, devoured his mother's patrimony as well as his wife's, and, to reconquer that, launched into wild speculations. At his death, enormous debts came to light. For these the Marquis was in no way responsible ; but he would allow no stain to be cast on the name of his ancestors. He did not hesitate one instant, and paid them all. To fill up the gap he sold everything, even his château, and once more nothing was left to him but the Manor. There the old gentleman retired proud and happy, for he could say with the chevaleresque King Francis the First, "*Tout est perdu fors l'honneur.*"

After this noble sacrifice, a bare sufficiency was left him to live upon, according to his rank. After the death of his son, he had

taken his daughter-in-law and her child with him. The poor mother did not long survive her husband, and the orphan girl became her father's comforter. Whilst he kissed and played with her, he forgot all past misfortunes.

“I am still rich,” he would say, “as long as you remain with me.”

Later, when he had recovered his serenity, his confidence in the future, he added—

“We have got over greater misfortunes than these—the star of the Navailles is not set!”

To know him better still, we must now enter the drawing-room, where Pierre Morisseau and his daughter have joined him.

Although the Marquis is nearly 80 years of age, he is so sprightly you would scarcely believe him to be more than 60. The fire of youth burns in his eye. His finely marked features, his exquisite politeness and courtly smile, all in him brings back to memory the 18th century, and the ancient *régime*.

His beautiful white hair is curled, and so thick, you would almost fancy it to be a well-

powdered wig. He shows his small size off to the best advantage, and the shooting jacket he generally wears looks on his nervous and active shape like a dress coat. He has a white neckcloth and a frilled shirt, from which he constantly dislodges, with the tip of his fingers, the snuff fallen upon it. I would not advise you to quarrel with him, for an injustice, an unkind word, revive in him the ancient musketeer, and, by a natural motion, his hand seems ready to lay hold of the hilt of his sword. He is witty, indulgent and kind, like all elderly people who have led an irreproachable life, and who remember their own youth.

Irene, his grand-daughter, is tall and slight, with very dark hair, but she has blue eyes and the complexion of a fair beauty—a sort of Diana Vernon. Her mother was an English woman. Her riding habit is of black cloth; a small felt hat, trimmed with a feather of the same colour, forms a ravishing head-dress. Her attitude is lovely; hanging over her grandfather, her arms round his neck, she is speaking to him in her softest accents.

“ Now, grandpapa dear, do not be extravagant, I certainly found the mantilla pretty, and heaven knows how sorry I am for having done so; only we must also think of the state of our finances; they are greatly involved you know.”

“ Have I not just received my dividends?’ asked the Marquis.

“ I want the whole of them, otherwise I cannot balance my budget. We have creditors, papa.”

“ But that is no reason why I should refuse you a present, darling.”

“ Grandpapa, I have not asked you for anything.”

“ While you were looking at the shop, miss, I read in your blue eyes, how much you would like to have that mantilla.”

“ I will not have it, grandpapa; pray do let us be economical.”

“ Hush! here comes Morisseau.”

The Marquis possessed all the pride of the nobility, but he had none of their vanity; he treated as equals all well-educated and noble-

minded men. A short time after his arrival in the Borough, the liquidation of Navailles had been entrusted to Pierre Morisseau. This ordeal had caused them to esteem and value one another. A more intimate acquaintance was formed between them, principally between the two young girls. They were of the same age. Their education had been confided to the same governess, they loved one another like sisters.

After the first compliments were over, the Marquis turned to Agathe, and said—

“My dear child, the roses on your cheeks are not the only ones to which Irene has come to pay a visit. Take her with you for a walk in the garden. She wants her nosegay.”

“I rather suspect we are turned out of the room,” said Miss de Navailles, smiling.

“So much the better,” answered Miss Morisseau, “our flowers were waiting for you.” And throwing her arm round her companion’s waist she led her away.

Irene’s aristocratic beauty made Agathe appear prettier. She was delightfully small,

all her motions were graceful, her features delicate, her complexion unequalled, and in the softness of her large black eye you might read the purity of her soul. She was as gay and lively as a bird.

She had not the least coquetry in her; she wore linen dresses in summer, woollen ones in winter, and on holidays scarcely added a bit of ribbon to tie up her wavy auburn hair. A compliment made her blush, unless it was made on the neatness with which she had her father's house kept. That was her greatest pride; always rising with the dawn, you never saw her idle—now putting this thing away, then sewing a stitch to that—household duties were her greatest pleasure. One day you would find her busy about the washing, another she was making preserves.

The garden was a marvel, and it was Agathe's triumph. From spring to autumn she worked in it like a true gardener; a straw hat on her head, and a watering pot or a pair of scissors in her hand, she always found something new to do to it. Her delight was

to show her flowers, or to give them to her dear Irene.

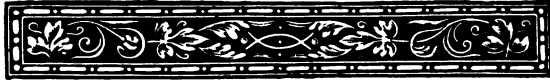
On that day, however, Irene seemed to care neither for pinks nor daisies. She hurried on impatiently, concealed herself behind a hedge, and after having ascertained that no one would see or hear her, she said in a low voice—

“Have you got the money, Agathe?”

“Yes,” answered she, in the same tone of voice.

Evidently some secret existed between the two young girls.





CHAPTER IV.

TWO SECRETS.

A PAPER containing some small coin could be seen in Agathe's hand.

"It is very little indeed! only twenty francs! God knows how I bargained—but it was impossible to obtain more."

"How grateful I am to you, dearest Agathe," said Irene, taking the money which she put in her pocket, and drawing out a small packet. "This is this week's work. Do you think you can dispose of it with the same success?"

"Without the least doubt," answered Agathe. "But how have you managed to finish all that lace already? Miss Susan and yourself must have worked every night."

"It is necessary we should—but pray hide that. Our household expenses are very

heavy, and grandpapa has not the least idea our income is not sufficient. He cannot keep money. He is so kind, so generous! Why he had taken it into his head to spend some just now for me."

"How so?"

Irene related the history of the mantilla.

"Luckily," she added, "I have prevented his doing so. Otherwise all my economical plans would be upset! I should find myself in a dreadful dilemma."

"Poor Irene!" said Agathe, her eyes filling with tears, and, throwing her arms round her companion's neck, she kissed her fondly.

"Bah!" replied Irene, "labour rejoices the heart. Did you not teach me that truth, kind Agathe, it makes me proud to think I can be useful. The only essential point is that grandpapa should not suspect anything. Are you certain the merchant will not betray us?"

"Impossible! he does not even know you. He is a stranger to the place, and only comes on market days to buy lace from the lace-makers."

“But you are not a lace-maker.”

“Oh! he fancies that with my savings I lend money to the lace-makers and make them work in return.”

“Perhaps he even fancies you gain something by it?”

“So much the better, then my traffic will seem more natural to him; our citizen's wives do not blush for doing so.”

At this supposition all Mdlle. de N.'s pride was roused.

“That,” said she, “is the most frightful part of our poverty. If I could but own it, and fight bravely and openly against it. No, I am forced to dissemble, to deceive, and compromise you also—”

Agathe quickly put her hand before her lips. “Will you hold your tongue, naughty one, and not regret that I should share your devotion, your sorrow. Do not begrudge me the slight pleasure of being of use to you.”

Irene kissed her, and wiping her eyes tried to smile.

“It must not be seen that we have been

crying. The gentlemen are coming—let us set about the nosegay.”

* * * * *

When they were left alone the Marquis said to M. Morisseau—

“I sent the young ladies away, because I wished to speak to you, my friend. I want some advice from you.”

“At your service, Marquis.”

“Thank you. Has the Château de Navailles been sold again lately?”

“Yes, for the third time.”

“Do you know the new proprietor?”

“Not at all. He just passed through the country. He is a contractor for public works and railroads; and said to be a millionaire. His name is Moubray.”

“Exactly so,” said the Marquis, looking at a card he had just taken from his pocket-book. “Only finding his name rather short, he takes the liberty of adding mine to his. He calls himself Maubray de Navailles.”

“Are you certain of that?”

“Here is his card. It has been sent to me from Paris.”

The two names were engraved upon it.

“What do you think about it?” asked the old gentleman.

“Law is on your side.”

“Formerly I should have had recourse to my sword. Now I am old, and people would laugh at me. I will appeal to justice. The name of my ancestors is the only inheritance I have left, I will allow no one to touch it.”

“Perhaps a simple notice would be sufficient,” replied the magistrate.

“That was my first thought, for the very audaciousness of this gentleman proves his simplicity. Besides I do not like law-suits, they are expensive, and Irene would scold me. However, I could not write to him coolly, will you do so for me?”

“Willingly.”

“I should feel grateful to you for it, Morisseau; but I wish to see the letter, which must be rather sharp.”

“I will write immediately; tell me what you wish me to say.”

“No; write from your own ideas. I want to make a small purchase in the neighbourhood; I shall not be gone ten minutes. Should Irene come in, do not tell her I have left the house; I wish to surprise her.”

The Marquis took his hat and stick, and disappeared.

On his return, the letter was written. He read it, and approved of it, although he said—

“It is not very severe, but it is dignified. Send it, and I will think no more about it. Now we must go and look after those young ladies.”

When they went into the garden the two friends were running about from one plant to the other, all along the flower beds.

Irene's arms were loaded with flowers. Yet Agathe continued plucking dahlias, azaleas, and roses.

“Enough! now that is quite enough.”

said Irene. "Indeed, you must not deprive yourself of all your flowers for me."

"Pray, where would be the harm?" replied her friend, gaily. "This is my wealth, and it is renewed every day. Look at the quantity of buds. Not one of those flowers will be missed to-morrow. I take care of those plants and flowers myself, and for you. Each of them contains a small part of my heart, of my affection; do not refuse them, for that is why I give them to you."

Just at that moment the Marquis and M. Morisseau came in sight; they were turning the alley in which they were.

Her grandfather's malicious and triumphant smile told Irene that he had been guilty of some folly.

"Grandfather, have you bought that mantilla?" she exclaimed.

"Of course I have. It is in the seat of the carriage."

The two young girls looked at one another.



CHAPTER V.

ON THE ROAD.

IRENE'S trials were far from being ended.

At the inn, when they got into the carriage, the stable-boy came up to the Marquis and very politely taking off his cap, said—

“My Lord Marquis, it is to be next week.”

“What, Bastrin?”

“My wedding with Jacqueline; here she is, my lord, come to present her most respectful duties to you.”

Jacqueline was the maidservant. A bonnie country girl, who curtsied, smiling and showing her teeth.

“I congratulate you both. Here, this will help to pay the fiddlers,” he added, putting a twenty-franc piece in Bastrin's hand.

No one guessed the meaning of Irene's bitter smile.

It was the sum she had just received from Agathe, and represented a fortnight of her mysterious labour.

"Let us be off now," said the Marquis, gaily.

Their carriage was anything but aristocratic—an old break, to which the village cartwright had adapted a head with curtains. Had it been a farmer's, it would have been called a calash.

But the horse was a good one. Miss de Navailles often rode him.

Formerly the old nobleman used to accompany the lovely Amazon. They had two horses then; one of them died, and Irene obtained that it should not be replaced. Her grandfather's age was the pretext, economy the real motive.

When you leave the village to return to the Manor, the road at first runs along the banks of the river; then, by a gentle slope, turns off, continuing between thick hedges, here and

there overshadowed by stately elms, forming beautiful green arches. When you reach the valley you have a splendid view of the forest in the horizon. Then the road becomes once more so steep that it is the custom to walk quietly to the summit, so that the horses may rest a little.

With this intention the Marquis got out of the carriage, and gave the reins to Irene. She made a slight motion, as if to prevent his doing so, for she had seen that the old man who was mending the road had already raised himself and taken off his hat.

Another call on the small budget.

“Grandpapa,” she said, “You know we are not rich now.”

“But we are still Navailles. I am in the habit of speaking to old John.”

“Do you want any change, grandpapa?”

“I have got some, thank you,” he replied.

“Take the reins, Irene.”

He walked up to the old man.

“Good evening, John. How are you getting on?”

“Sadly, my lord; my eldest boy is a soldier now; the others do not earn anything; their mother is laid up with the ague, and to add to all this, bread is very dear. To complete our misfortunes, I have received an order of ejection from our poor dwelling, and, unless you generously come to our assistance, sir, to-morrow we shall not have a roof to sleep under.”

The Marquis knew the poor man had never deceived him; so, waiting until the break had passed the heap of stones before which they were standing, he quickly put his hand in his pocket.

Irene had turned round, and was looking through an aperture in the curtains. She saw old John's hand close upon a golden coin.

“Two,” said she to herself. “Oh, grandfather, what is to become of us.”

After having left the old man, he walked briskly towards the carriage, and seated himself gaily, near her.

She said nothing. Of what use would it *have been*?

He looked at her from under his eyelids, as a child would do who is afraid of confessing a fault.

“Come now,” said he, “I would rather be scolded at once if I have deserved it. Poor old John is so miserable. You guess I have given him something.”

“I saw you,” she answered softly. “Believe me, grandpapa, if we were not so badly off ourselves I should be the first to ask you to be charitable. It must be such happiness to make all comfortable around you! But we cannot do so; you ruin us.”

He had taken her hands and covered them with kisses. When he felt himself forgiven he answered—

“We do not receive our income every day; *et noblesse obligé*, to these good people I am still a Marquis, Miss.”

It was very true.

The horse going down hill at full speed, they soon joined the bands of peasants who had left the market an hour before.

In every group, in the carts, all turned

round, all rose to bow to the Marquis and his grand-daughter, and all these salutations were as respectful as they were affectionate.

“ You see ! we are beloved, child, and if ever fortune returns to us it will give joy to all the country.”

“ But we have nothing to hope for.”

“ Nothing ! That is saying a great deal. Our motto is, ‘ *Navailles se relève,*’ and that until now has been true. Ten times our star has been eclipsed, but only to shine more brilliantly than ever. Must I remind you of the history of our house ? Its first lustre was owing to a treasure brought back from the Crusades, but which was bravely spent in fighting against the English. A Navailles was the friend of Jacques Cœur, and enriched himself with that great man. Another one was the friend and companion of the Bearnese, and, poor as he was himself, he rewarded him for his devotion by adding fresh splendour to his name when he himself had regained his throne. A third, having spent his last farthing, went to India, and returned loaded

with gold and jewels. Then came the Revolution. When one has got through such times, darling, one may believe in Destiny. Are there not such things as American inheritances, and wealthy marriages? I have had two for my share. I only wish for one for you, Miss; and that one, the fairies, who have endowed you so marvellously, will provide for you."

Irene could not help saying with a smile—

"We never see any one at the Manor."

"True," answered the Marquis, it rather resembles Sleeping Beauty's palace. But who can say that the Prince is not on his way to it? The Princess, in the tale, slept one hundred years. We have not come to that yet."

"Mere dreams, grandpapa."

"Then let me dream! Are they not gates open to hope?"

M. De Navailles was one of those men who never despair. Fancying himself grown rich again, when the beggars and ragged urchins approached the break they had no doubt

being watching for, he threw them a handful of pence, among which, a few silver coins might be seen.

Poor Irene, all this while was wishing herself at home.

A quarter of an hour after, they came in view of the Manor. It was built on an eminence, and at a distance looked stately. An artist would have thought that it formed a beautiful landscape. A little higher still, and on the skirts of the forest, might be seen the remains of a wall and a broken down tower. They were the ruins of the ancient château.

The horse, allured by the neighbourhood of his stable, was galloping on, when suddenly he pricked up his ears. Joyful barkings were heard, and a large spaniel came bounding towards them.

“ Here comes Bryan,” said the Marquis, “ down—now go down, my dog ! You will get crushed ! Another time you shall go with us, but on market days it is impossible, you’re too wild ; there now he’s after his *friend Bayard*. Take care, Bayard ! ”

Bayard was the horse's name, and Bryan leapt about him; he had been let loose when the carriage came in sight. Wild with joy and liberty, he bounded round it, till they reached the gate and entered the court-yard of the Manor.

At the entrance of the hall stood a lady who, although she was past the prime of life, was still handsome.

“Good evening, Susan!” said the Marquis. “How bright your eyes look! How you smile! I am sure I can guess the cause of that happiness. You have heard from Bernard.”

Before going any farther it is time we should introduce Susan and Bernard to the reader.





CHAPTER VI.

THE GOVERNESS.

IRENE was not six years old when she lost her mother. To whom should the Marquis confide the care, the education of the orphan? Such was the question he asked himself every day.

From a numerous retinue, two old servants alone remained with him at the time of his ruin. Ambroise has accumulated in his person the different occupations of groom, gardener, valet, &c. Marianne, his wife, with difficulty united the different employments of cook, housemaid and dairy maid.

The Marquis, who, on no account whatever, would have parted with his grand-daughter, determined on having a governess at the *Manor*.

He went to Paris, and, after a few days absence, brought back with him Miss Susan Aubert.

She was in the prime of life, good tempered and reserved, even rather inclined to gravity. Her looks told of some great trials in the past.

The child soon doted upon her.

“ You must love and obey Miss Aubert,” her grandfather had said to her, “ you will soon find out she deserves your affection. I have known her a long time, and chosen her to take your mother’s place.”

Susan Aubert was fully capable of fulfilling the part allotted to her. By her constant solicitude, by that affection so truly precious to young minds, she acquired a happy influence over Irene’s mind, instructing and amusing her by turns.

A piano had been sent for.

Pianos are objects of ridicule to the Parisians, but in the provinces, in the country, in such an isolated residence as the Manor, it was a great resource.

Pierre Morisseau often called on the Marquis. He loved music and had long been deprived of it, so that it was with the greatest pleasure he heard Susan play some of the *chefs d'œuvres* of our great masters.

“Are you aware Marquis, that you possess a great artist in Mdlle. Aubert?”

“No doubt,” replied the old nobleman, “she was the first pupil in music at Saint Denis. Then she is an officer’s daughter. Her father was formerly a quartermaster in my squadron. He became a captain, married late when on half-pay, and died a widower, without leaving his child a farthing. His daughter was obliged to leave her own country, and go as a governess to Russia. This exile lasted ten years. Hearing of her return, I went for her. It was a good fortune for us, for her also, perhaps. She has no relations left and is alone in the world. All her affection is concentrated on Irene. I consider Susan as belonging to the family; she shall never leave us.”

“Marquis,” said the magistrate, after a

short silence, " you have often expressed the wish of being able to do me a service."

" It is the least I owe you, in exchange for the many you have done me, my dear Morisseau, pray explain your wish."

" I should not like to send Agathe to school. Will you allow Mdlle. Susan to be her governess ? "

" That is the most agreeable proposal you could make me."

" It is not to be gratuitously," said the judge.

" Allow me ! "

" You have just told me, Marquis, Mdlle. Aubert has no fortune. It is but just I should contribute for my share."

" I must consult her," said the nobleman, " she is proud, and might perhaps refuse."

On the contrary, Susan accepted.

Her reasons for doing so were without doubt excellent, for after having heard them, the Marquis could not help saying affectionately—

" You are always right, Susan."

It was then agreed that twice a week Ambroise should go and fetch Agathe to spend the day at the Manor. Two other days Irene went with her governess to M. Morisseau's. The Marquis often drove them there himself.

The friendship and intimacy of these two young ladies proceeded from thence. Now and then, as a reward, they would ask leave to spend a few days, sometimes a whole week, together.

The magistrate, who was loath to part with his daughter, reluctantly consented, while the Marquis would joyfully exclaim, "Now I shall be twice a grandfather. What fun we shall have, little girls."

When they were seven years old, one day the Marquis said to them—

"Children, I am expecting a play-fellow for you. The poor boy has neither father nor mother, or rather he has never known them. I have almost adopted him. He was at school, but he has just been very ill, and the doctor has ordered change of air.

He is to spend some time with us. You must receive him as you would a brother."

Susan, who was very pale, had, during this conversation, retired to the further end of the drawing-room. When the two girls were gone, she came towards the old man. Her eyes were filled with tears, and seizing hold of his hand, she pressed it to her lips.

"Susan, you must be calm. I keep my promise, and depend upon yours."

She answered in a tremulous voice—

"I will not fail to do it. May God bless you for your kindness."

That same evening the Marquis went to the village to await the arrival of the mail (railroads were not known in that locality). He brought Bernard home with him.

He was about ten years old, and had a very intelligent countenance, but it was sad and timid, like that of all motherless children.

His pallid features made him look more interesting. He scarcely dared lift up his eyes.

Irene, at her grandfather's request, went and shook hands with him.

With great good humour the Marquis stimulated his *protégé*. He succeeded in encouraging him, and making him smile. The governess, who was sitting at work in an obscure part of the room, had not moved.

"Susan," said the Marquis, "will you not welcome this young savage? Come and kiss him. He is, for some time, to be your third pupil."

She rose slowly, went to the orphan, and touched his forehead with her lips.

He looked at her as if some confused remembrance was awaked in him.

"Ah! ah! my lad, you recognise her! Yes, you are not mistaken, that is the lady who used to go and see you for me, at your nurse's, a long time ago. Yours is the heart's remembrance."

Then, as if desirous of changing the conversation, he added, "After this long journey he must require rest. Susan, be kind enough to see about him. Come, Irene, we will go for a walk."

The governess accompanied the new comer to the room she had had prepared for him,

and when sleep had closed the child's eyes, when she had kissed him a last time, then she returned to the drawing-room, calm and smiling.

The next day it was Irene's turn to play the *châtelaine*. She took Bernard all over the Manor. They walked and conversed together. Everything astonished and delighted the young Parisian, who saw extensive horizons, cattle, the forest, rocks—the country, in fact, for the first time.

Bayard and Brian were presented to him as future friends. Agathe then came to pay him a visit; she expressed a wish to know all about him.

He told them he had remained four years with his nurse in the environs of Paris, at Belleville. Then he had been sent to school. The schoolmaster's wife, who had no children, was very fond of him. He complained of no one; far from it, everything seemed right and just to him. He had one of those frank, ingenuous minds, to whom the spirit of evil is unknown even in others.

The holidays had, until then, been the saddest time he had known ; while his school-fellows went home for days, weeks or months, he, who had no family, was forced to remain alone. He had been very ill lately, but now he felt quite well again. The air was so pure at the Manor ; no high walls to shut out trees, flowers, liberty, and that glorious sun. Every one was so kind to him. He was kissed and beloved, and that was such a new thing to the poor orphan, that his heart was filled with gratitude and joy.

Lessons were soon begun, but he never had had any such as Susan gave him, and he made wonderful progress. With the governess he became familiar from the first. She had gained his confidence, and an unaccountable empire over him, so that though she was very severe sometimes, he doted upon her.

He almost venerated the Marquis, and impatiently waited for an opportunity of showing his gratitude to him. Susan had told him how much he was indebted to him, even *for his present happiness.*

Irene seemed to him a graceful little fairy,

whose careful and discreet attendant he thought himself called upon to be. Waiting until she called him—for he would not have dared speak to her first—he was attentive to her least fancies. If she wished for a flower growing on the steepest rocks, a nest perched on the summit of the loftiest tree, quickly, spontaneously, at the risk of breaking his neck, he got over the obstacle or the distance, and returned out of breath, and joyful to witness the pleasure he brought with the desired object.

One day, the Marquis and Susan were seated under the shadow of two large elm trees, which formed the entrance of an enclosure. The Marquis was reading and Susan embroidering. The children were running about. Irene crept through the barrier and entered the enclosure. She was gathering daisies; Bernard and Brian had followed her, when suddenly a bull came rushing on Irene, who had red ribbons on her hat. Brian flew at the animal and turned him off.

Susan and the Marquis ran to rescue the imprudent girl, but Bernard was already between

the affrighted child and the savage animal ; standing in an heroic and resolute attitude, he had made for her a rampart with his body.

“ You need not have been so frightened,” said he, “ Brian and I were with her.”

“ What could you have done, my lad ?” asked the Marquis.

“ Been killed by the bull before it touched her !” was his reply.

The old gentleman warmly applauded this speech. “ You are a brave boy,” he said. The Marquis became remarkably fond of his *protégé*. His great amusement was to provoke him into impetuosity, and Bernard, generally of a mild disposition, could then scarcely command himself. He became wild with play, and Susan was the only person who, at such times, could quiet him. Then, he would even kiss her. The inhabitants of the Manor had never been gayer or happier.

With autumn came the end of the holidays, when Bernard must return to school.

“ Oh no ! not yet, pray !” he exclaimed, and he looked at Irene, so that she might *second his entreaties*.

“Do you not think, grandpapa, that if we kept him here a little longer it would do him a great deal of good?”

“His health and strength might be greatly improved by remaining a twelvemonth at the Manor. But I am afraid it would be abusing Mdlle. Aubert's complaisance.” These last words were said rather maliciously, but the children did not notice them.

Susan protested her willingness, and kept her third pupil. At the end of that time he was to be sent to the college of the chief town of the department. The happy days of youth are soon over. That year passed like a spell. The Marquis would willingly have granted another delay, but Susan insisted on his going. Bernard was disconsolate. Irene's eyes were filled with tears. Susan alone apparently remained unmoved.

“What a *stoicien* you are,” said the Marquis, “I admire you; and yet I could swear to it you are not the least fond of Bernard.”

“I love him for his own good,” she replied, smiling. “He will return to us during the holidays.”



CHAPTER VII.

ANOTHER VACATION.

ANOTHER year had now elapsed, and Bernard once more returned to the Manor.

“Have you brought back many prizes?” asked the Marquis.

“One only, Sir; the prize for drawing.”

“Then, my dear boy, your pencil is more successful than your pen.”

His taste and aptitude were indeed turned that way, and Susan had good cause to applaud herself for having given him those elementary notions which are seldom learnt at college. He neglected Latin and Greek, the grand scenes of history alone interested him; but his greatest application was to drawing. In this, said the notes he had brought, he is an exceptional pupil.

He had returned more lively and, perhaps, giddier, but towards the Marquis and his granddaughter, he had preserved the same respectful affection he had devoted to them from his first appearance at the Manor.

Although Irene was but a child, and treated him like a brother, he was respectful towards her. He called Mdlle. Morisseau "Agathe," but Irene always was "Mdlle. Irene" for him ; and yet he loved her dearly.

Two other holidays were spent in the same way. At college he had met with Antoine Froment, who sometimes came to pay him a visit at the Manor.

Then, the two schoolfellows would run, wrestle, and accomplish all sorts of feats, over which Irene, often accompanied by Agathe, presided, like two ladies of yore over the tournaments of their knights.

Anthony was the tallest and the strongest, but Bernard was the most skilful and the boldest. He was almost always victorious. Anthony was never jealous of his success. He was happy to see his friend noticed, and

it was when the Marquis witnessed his feats that he was most pleased.

“*Vive Dieu!*” said M. de Navailles, “if Heaven had granted me a grandson, I should have wished him to resemble you, Bernard.”

Suddenly, all this ardour disappeared; Bernard was getting on for sixteen. A prevailing idea, a sort of passion already captivated his mind. This was drawing. He returned with a lot of drawing paper, albums, pencils, fusains, and engravings. He set to work immediately, and each day produced some new sketch. The Manor, the garden, the park, Ambroise, Marianne, Bayard, and Brian, each had their turn. When he had sketched all the environs, he went on farther, through the forest, seeking for some type, some landscape, with which to inspire his young imagination.

One day, in a glade possessing an aspect of wildness, he saw a large, red umbrella, and under its cover, for the sun was scorching, a stranger—an artist, painting.

That picturesque country had already attracted several; but he was the first Bernard had seen. He approached softly; his heart was beating.

The painter was so much taken up with his work that he did not hear him. It was almost finished, and represented a clump of old oaks, growing a few steps from the spot where he was seated.

Bernard uttered a cry of surprise and admiration.

The astonished artist looked up. He was about fifty, had a long grey beard, a high and bald forehead, an imposing and austere look. He might have been taken for a patriarch—an apostle.

His costume of grey velvet, high shoes, broad-brimmed hat, and the knapsack lying on the rock near him, revealed him to be one of those pioneers of art who go about in search of the beauties of nature. In his button-hole was the ribbon of the *Légion d'Honneur*.

A benevolent smile played on his features whilst he examined Bernard.

The boy could not take his eyes off the painting.

“How splendid! Oh! if I only had some paint.”

“What would you do with it, my young friend?” asked the stranger.

“I would try to paint.”

“First of all, can you draw?”

Bernard showed him his album.

The artist turned the leaves over one by one, stopping almost at each, to give some mark of approbation.

“Not bad—better still—a real feeling of nature—the stroke is good—boldness and originality.”

Then placing his hand on Bernard's forehead—

“There is something there!” said he.

“Oh!” exclaimed the lad, “if you would but teach me!”

“Why not, child!” answered the artist. “I shall remain one month at the village inn. Tell the joiner to make a portable easel for you, like this one. He can come to me for

the model. I will give you all that is necessary for painting, and advice when you ask for it."

The next day Bernard was at work with his new friend.

His first paintings were certainly not masterpieces; but firmness and taste were visible in them. His master had said to him—

"Go boldly onwards! Look at me! Find out for yourself. You will never learn how to swim if you do not throw yourself in the water; when you feel that you are sinking, then, and then only, ask me for help. In landscape painting I only acknowledge two masters, nature and the sun."

At other times, and to encourage his youthful companion, he would relate the lives of some artists, his colleagues, who, self-taught, had acquired fame and fortune.

"It is necessary to work hard, to endure many hardships, but when God has endowed you with sufficient talents to be better than an amateur, you must succeed."

Then he would amuse him by relating

sallies and vagaries. This grave-looking old man was full of fun. Labour made him sprightly; now and then he even sung.

Thus stimulated and amused, Bernard used his brushes with as much ardour as delight. Evening alone brought him back to the Manor. At daybreak he started with only a piece of bread in his pocket. Where could he go to?

At first it was a mystery, and Susan began to be anxious.

One day, as the Marquis was riding out with Irene, they met the red umbrella; on approaching, they recognised Bernard.

"What ever are you doing here?" asked the old gentleman.

"Painting!" he proudly answered.

Everything was then explained.

"Do not scold him!" said the artist.

"He has not lost his time. Unless I am greatly mistaken, he will be an artist. His sketches are there. Show them, Bernard!"

"Let me look at them," said Irene, alighting from her horse.

She was only twelve years old; but solitude, Susan's lessons, her birth, all had united to give her a dignity of manner, without diminishing her childish grace. She was called "*La j'eune Chatelaine*" by the peasantry, and deserved the title for her wisdom and kindness.

The riding habit she wore added to her loveliness.

Bernard had run behind the rocks to the hiding-place where he put his sketches, and was now exhibiting them.

"Oh! do look, grandpapa, how pretty they are, and how well he has worked."

"These certainly are proofs of a great desire to succeed. They show remarkable dispositions for a boy of his age."

Then he went up to the painter, who had discreetly returned to his work.

"Will you allow us to look at your painting also, sir?" said he.

The artist bowed assent.

It was a large and splendid landscape, and almost finished.

“This!” exclaimed the Marquis, “is the work of a master of the art! Whom have I, then, the honour of addressing?”

“I am Claude Guérin,” simply answered the celebrated landscape painter.

The Marquis bowed.

“Although we lead a solitary life,” said he, “none of the illustrious of France are strangers to us. We receive the papers at Navailles. Besides, I formerly lived in Paris. I was rich at that time; had paintings, and loved them. I was even thought a connoisseur. It certainly is a very long while ago; but my memory is good, and in my retreat I have dwelt on the remembrance of those artists, whose first steps in the career I have been a witness to. You are one of these, M. Claude Guérin; and I am happy to meet you here, in this domain, which formerly belonged to me, and from which my ancestors derived their name, and which your talent will illustrate. Will you allow me to shake hands with you?”

The cordiality of the nobleman's manners *touched the painter.*

“I hope,” continued the Marquis, “you are not going to remain at the inn, but that you will accept our hospitality at the Manor.”

“Many thanks for your offer,” answered the artist. “Pray do not be offended at my refusal. Frankly, if you wish to be agreeable to me, leave me my liberty.”

“At least we shall see you sometimes. You will dine with us.”

“I have not even a suitable dress with me. Besides, you know it, we like to work according to fancy, and as long as the sun is above the horizon.”

“The rainy days alone remain, then, and on those I must depend!”

Then, pointing to Bernard, he added—

“Are you, then, interested in that boy?”

“I believe he has a spark of genius in him, and if it does not die away—”

“Never,” interrupted Bernard. “If I could only possess such a master. But my holidays end in a week; he will remain here three weeks longer. Pray, do not send me back to

college, sir; allow me to profit by his advice, at least until his departure."

"Hem, hem! I—"

Bernard turned to Irene—"Do ask it for me, Mdle."

Irene joined her entreaties to his.

"We must hear what Susan says about it. Bernard must bring his gallery of paintings to the Manor. Mdle. Aubert is a good judge."

That same evening Bernard's paintings were exhibited in the drawing-room of the Manor.

Great was the governess' surprise. She could scarcely conceal her satisfaction, which was almost pride, and the departure was put off.





CHAPTER VIII.

THE SPARK OF GENIUS BURNS BRIGHT.

WILL or no, Claude Guérin was forced to go to the Manor.

He was a lively guest; his conversation was original and witty. It was very interesting to hear him relate his beginning in life, his fights with destiny. One of the million, he had begun by painting sign-posts; the frothing bottle of beer from which the cork escapes; the duck's head peeping out of the pie crust; the bush of crawfish, and the carp with an eel in, saltier; the cat stealing the gudgeons, and the rabbits chased by the cook, &c., &c.—matelote and fried fish.

Alone, without any protector, through his perseverance and confidence in the future, he

had conquered talent and fame. Like the sailor who has reached the port, he laughed at the storms and sufferings of the voyage. When he spoke of the attacks of critics, which had so long crossed his path, his brow darkened with the thought. He had never submitted to any conventional maxim or servitude. It was from independence that he had remained a bachelor. Nature and himself had been his only masters; Nature was his sole affection, his only school. He had studied Nature in the depths of forests, on desert shores, and during every summer season he lived completely alone, like Bas de Cuir, of the Last of the Mohicans.

His health, unfortunately, was far from resembling that of Fenimore Cooper's hero. The first cold days in October brought on a bad cough. He became feverish, and was obliged to return to Paris.

"Pray, allow me to go with you, sir!" said Bernard.

"I should like it immensely," answered Claude. "But the Marquis! your family!"

“I have no family—or rather I should like to prove an honour to that family which has adopted me. I am like yourself. Like you also I will work—and succeed!”

He spoke in this grateful and resolute manner before all the inmates of the Manor.

The Marquis would perhaps have consented, he was pleased with this boldness, but Susan rendered him untractable by saying—

“He must first finish his studies.”

Claude Guérin went away alone. Bernard seemingly quite resigned to his fate, returned to college.

About the middle of November, a messenger came, sent by the principal of the college, to inform the Marquis that Bernard had run away.

Some days had been spent very anxiously, when a letter was received from Claude Guérin. The fugitive was in Paris at his house.

“Be convinced, sir, that I did not authorise this freak. No one could be more astonished than I was myself when he arrived yesterday

evening, tired to death, and almost starving. He had walked all the way; he left the college with 15 francs in his pocket, little more than a penny a league. The poor boy must rest a few days at least; then I will send him back to you if you wish it. Allow me to state that such would not be my opinion. His vocation is a true one, and I love the boy. If you will leave him to me, I will be a father to him, and answerable for his future position. I will make an artist and an honest man of him."

This proposal, which had been inspired by Claude Guérin's kindness, met with the nobleman's approbation.

"Away with rhetoric and philosophy," he exclaimed. "I, also, am confident of the boy's genius. When the bird feels he has wings, he knows where to fly! Is not that your opinion, Susan?"

"You are the best judge, sir. But is not Paris very far?"

"Our young Telemachus has found his Mentor!"

“We know so very little about this mentor.”

“Have you forgotten his decoration? Artists do not generally obtain that easily, so that it is a guarantee for his honour. If you wish for others I will write to one of my old friends, who visits every studio, and knows all the painters. From him I can obtain any information we may desire.”

The encomiums lavished on the artist surpassed all they could have hoped for, and such was the austerity of Claude Guérin's morals that in the artistic world he was surnamed Claude the Virtuous, or Saint Claude. Bernard, therefore, was allowed to remain with him.

Who could describe the excess of his joy. His letters were more like *Te Deums* than anything else; and M. Guérin never forgot to add postscripts attesting the satisfaction his pupil gave him, and his wonderful progress.

“He shall be more than a landscape painter, we must make an historical painter

of him. From this motive, and although it is against my principles, I send him to the Beaux Arts. There he has already distanced the cleverest. He possesses imagination and poetry. You need no longer be anxious about our Bernard's future, for he will realise my horoscope."

"Bravo!" said the Marquis, "that excellent Claude is a sort of Nostradamus—and I believe in his prophesies."

"So do I!" replied Irene.

Susan alone remained silent.

The two artists were expected at the Manor towards the latter end of summer. An inflammation of the lungs prevented Claude Guérin from leaving Paris, and Bernard naturally remained there to watch over his master. It was a very long illness, after which the doctors prescribed a winter spent in Italy. He would not leave Bernard behind. Was it not for his studies, an opportunity which might never be met with again? So that Bernard should be able to pay a visit at the Manor before his departure, Claude pro-

ceeded alone to Marseilles. From thence they went on to Florence, and then settled at Rome. The trip lasted more than two years.

“Do not be impatient,” the artist had often written to the Marquis, “our child is well. His talent is increasing, the spark of genius burns brighter than ever. And I am now forced to acknowledge it, here and here only can great artists be formed. When he returns to France his success will be certain.”

It began at Navailles. Two years had made such a wonderful change in him. The Italian sun had bronzed his features, his brow was pensive, his look inspired. He resembled the beautiful portrait Raphaël has left of himself at twenty.

“I must own,” said the Marquis, “people are right when they say that travelling forms youth. You have profited by yours in every way.”

Irene had not required travelling to become lovely, and Bernard looked at her with ecstasy.

“You remind me,” he said, “of those

beautiful Madonas I admired so much at Rome, and which one cannot help adoring."

Then he fondly pressed Susan to his heart. M. Morisseau and his daughter came the next day to welcome him.

Agathe was just turned sixteen, but she seemed to wish to keep as long as possible the ingenuous graces of girlhood. Bernard felt as if it was but the day before he had left the fair and smiling girl who received him still as the companion of her childish sports. Anthony soon followed also, and the two friends spoke of their plans for the future.

All in the house, in the neighbourhood, the animals themselves *fêted* Bernard's return.

Brian alone did not seem to know him, and as he expressed his astonishment at it, Irene said to him—

"Have you not yet observed it is not the same dog, it is old Brian's son. Grandpapa has always had a spaniel of that breed, and which is always called Brian. This is Brian XIV."

After a few days enjoyment, Bernard began to think of his departure for Paris. Armed

cap-à-pie for battle, he was desirous of commencing.

Claude had made him promise he would soon join him. Besides, it was during this year that he would have to draw for the conscription. Was it not necessary that he should make money to pay his *remplacant*.

“Do not be uneasy about that,” said the Marquis, “we have thought about it long ago, you are insured.”

Bernard was now a man, and things appeared to him in their true light. Until then he had fancied opulence reigned at the Manor. Some things which he saw now made him suspect the truth.

“Susan, is the Marquis rich?” he asked of the governess.

“Alas! no,” she replied, “I will even confide to you as a secret, for he has no idea of it, we are rather badly off.”

“Thank you,” said Bernard, “I know my duty now.”

The next day, whilst conversing with the Marquis, he said to him—

“ Will you grant me a favour, sir ? ”

“ What is it, child ? speak ! ”

“ My paintings will now bring in much more than sufficient for my wants ; do not make me an allowance any longer.”

“ Will you hold your tongue, foolish boy ! ” replied the old gentleman, who would not even listen to him.

However, a month after his return to Paris, Bernard sent the following letter to the Manor—

“ ‘ Excuse me, sir, if at a distance I dare renew my prayer, do not send me any more money. I really do not want it. I am earning some, and those first earnings are delightful. Do not accuse me of pride, much less of ingratitude. I owe you everything, and the remembrance of your kindness will never be obliterated from my mind. The small pictures I brought from Rome are all sold. An illustrated newspaper has given me an order for one picture per month, that is almost sufficient to live upon. I shall not for that neglect my more serious studies ; I am be-

ginning a grand thing for the exhibition. If my kind professor's hopes are realised, I shall be rich.

"I am so already. A small box I send at the same time as this letter will be a proof of what I state. Pray do not frown; do not refuse me the joy of offering you all a slight token of remembrance. My small presents will please you, I believe, because they are reminiscences of our last conversations. Do you remember the old-fashioned walking stick with an ivory handle, I drew one evening from your indications? 'That is it exactly,' you said, 'and nothing supports an old man better.' There is one in the box.

"While I was drawing, Mdlle. Irene asked me to give her an idea of the jewels which the Campana Museum had just brought out. One of the earrings seemed to please her; I have sent a pair. They will, I think, suit her Roman patrician beauty.

"The design of a *basque capeline* seemed to take my dear, kind Susan's fancy. The traditional colour alone did not suit her. Red

was too glaring; I have had a violet one made. I wish her to wear it in remembrance of me.

“To these things I have added a few trinkets for Agathe and Antoine, for Ambroise and Marianne. So that my friend Brian XIV. may not hurt himself when he is chained up, I have sent him a new-invented collar. I cannot forget the kindness shown me, and my thoughts are constantly at the Manor. I see the beloved country around it; the hospitable house in which I was received like a son. Mdlle. Irene, Susan, and you, sir—the noblest and best of men. All your portraits are in my studio, painted from memory; from them I receive advice and encouragement. How would it be possible for me to fall or weaken under your eyes! Distance has not separated us. Tell Susan so, my sister Irene, but first of all pray be convinced of it yourself. A celebrated writer has said, ‘Our children are those who love us.’ If that is true, I am yours, for I love you from the bottom of my heart.”

Mdlle. de Navailles read this letter aloud.

Her features were animated; her eyes sparkled. A smile played on her lips. At the end of it she laid her hand on her heart, and looked at those who were listening to her. Susan did not move, but her pale cheeks, on which silent tears were running, attested her emotion. The Marquis had closed his eyes to prevent his from flowing.

“Oh, God!” he exclaimed, “how happy I am to have adopted that boy! How happy his mother would be, if he had one!”

* * * * *

The young artist wrote very often. Every summer brought him to the Manor with Claude Guérin as a companion. He was happy during those visits, but they never lasted long. He had a feverish impatience of success, and was rapidly reaching his aim. Two exhibitions had procured him great success and all sorts of recompenses. At the next exhibition he hoped to obtain the *Croix d'Honneur*.

Such was the situation of the inhabitants of the Manor when we began this story.



CHAPTER IX.

DAME CERTAINLY.

WE must now return to Antoine Froment.

The day after the market day we spoke of in our first chapter, he was going out of his father's farm, when a gig, in which were M. Morisseau and his recorder, stopped at the door.

“ Good morning, Antoine,” said the magistrate. “ I am happy to meet with you ; I have something to ask you.”

“ At your service, sir. What do you wish to know ? ”

“ M. Maubray's address. You have seen him in Paris, so you must know it.”

“ I do.”

“ Then be kind enough to write it on this envelope, and put the letter in the post-office. It ought to have gone yesterday.”

It was the summons from the Marquis, about the name of Navailles, of which the new proprietor of the estate had made use.

Anthony went into the farm to write the address, and returned almost immediately. The letter-box was but two steps off at the village school door. M. Morisseau waited to see it sent off.

“Thank you, Anthony; you save me the trouble of going to the château. I should have been obliged to have had recourse to the steward.”

“He is a bad man,” replied Anthony. “But you still seem to be taking the road which leads to Navailles.”

“Yes, we have some business in the village—a little property to deliver over to the heir, and some boundaries to plant. Were you going there also?”

“Yes, sir; I was going to my god-mother’s.”

“Come with us, then! there is room enough for three in the gig.”

They then set off on their journey.

“Anything new?” asked the justice.
“Has papa Froment relented?”

“Alas, no!” said Antoine; “he persists in his refusal, and told me so this morning before he went out. If I do not find the ten thousand francs I want elsewhere, I shall be forced to give up the lease of the farm.”

“It would perhaps be the wisest plan after all. Come now, tell me why you will not become a notary.”

“Because I wish to be a farmer, and I am certain I shall succeed. You know me, M. Morisseau; acknowledge I am right.”

“I do not say you are wrong. But you are a good son, and must feel greatly the sorrow you are inflicting on your father.”

“Yes, but I feel confident he will approve my resolution later, be proud of my success, and happy in my prosperity. Bernard was allowed to follow his vocation, and every one has cause to rejoice at it; so it shall be with me, if I am allowed to follow mine. Besides, that marriage, you know—”

“With the notary's daughter?”

“ Yes ! ”

“ A rich match ! a pretty girl ! ”

“ Certainly—but—no, no, I will not. ”

“ Ah ! young fellow ! then you have some one else in view ? ”

Antoine blushed, and did not answer. A few minutes later he asked after Mdlle. Morisseau.

“ I should like to catch her being ill ! ” gaily replied the happy father. “ I have forbidden it, and my daughter is obedient. I don't think the doctors will make their fortune through her. Like a blue-bottle in the corn fields, she grows and blooms without help. ”

“ She does, indeed ! ” answered Antoine. And for a few minutes he remained pensive.

They soon came to some land belonging to the large farm. It was now autumn ; the sun shone mildly on the deserted fields. Not a labourer was seen.

“ They ought already to be ploughing here ! ” said young Froment, sorrowfully. “ What a pity it is to lose such fine weather. ”

“ But where will you find the money, Antoine ? ”

“I have one hope left, and you shall know it first, if it is realised.”

The chaise had reached an eminence from which they had a splendid view of the valley, where in the midst of trees and fields are spread the few cottages which compose the village of Navailles.

The magistrate stopped at the entrance of the village before the Mayor's door. His young companion was going on further.

“We shall expect to see you this evening. In the meantime I wish you all sort of success, Anthony.”

He shook his head doubtfully in reply, and walked on.

At the other extremity of the village stood a small farm, in a rather dilapidated condition. The entrance to it was through a court-yard, the gate of which was shut. Anthony vainly lifted up the latch, knocked at the door, then listened. Nobody answered. No noise was heard inside.

An infirm old man was basking in the sun on the step of a neighbouring cottage.

“ Ah ! ” said he sententiously, “ when thieves have paid a visit anywhere, the door is no longer left open. ”

Antoine, who knew the old man, turned to speak to him.

“ Where is my godmother ? ”

“ In the wood, Mother Certes has good legs still, you will find her on the way to the forest. ”

“ Thank you ! ” returned Antoine, following the road thus indicated.

It wound round the eminence which commanded the Manor.

“ What a pity the Marquis is so poor, ” thought he, as he went on to seek for his godmother.

In a village, every one has a nickname ; this good woman, whose real name was Rose Froment, had had hers given her from the habit she had of beginning all her sentences by the word certainly, so that she was generally known by the name of Dame Certainly.

Antoine was her nephew as well as her

godson. He had reached the first cross roads without meeting her, and he scarcely knew which path to choose.

He questioned several women returning from the forest, none of them had seen her, but she must certainly pass that way to return home.

The trunk of a tree was laying across the glade. Anthony sat down thoughtfully upon it.

After waiting about three-quarters of an hour, he fancied he heard a noise occasioned by some one treading on the leaves and broken branches which were strewed about. He looked up and in a narrow path of the forest, he saw a little woman carrying an enormous faggot, she was quite bent double under the weight. It was Dame Certainly.

Anthony ran towards her—

“How can you load yourself in such a manner!” he exclaimed, “do you fancy you are only twenty years old?”

“Certainly I am not a young girl—seventy-two years old—but I am still active and

strong! Ah! ah! godson I am glad to see you!"

At the same time she threw down her faggot to kiss him. Anthony was forced to stoop that she might reach his forehead, Round shouldered and bent down by age, she was scarcely more than four feet high. Her snowy white hair had been put out of order by the thicket and brambles; her slight figure was lively and neat; an apple has not more wrinkles at the end of the winter, than would be seen on her thin and sun-burnt face. The skin stuck to the bones, her nose and chin almost met. But her eyes were brilliant and her smile malicious. She would have been taken for one of those old fairies wandering through a vale.

"Come and sit down on my faggot, and let's have a gossip. You have always told me all your secrets, and that makes me happy. Besides, what is hidden to others, I guess. Hearts and eyes are the only things I can read in, but they are as familiar to me as the breviary is to the curate. So now,

my boy, keep no secrets from your old aunt. She knows your ambition, your love—”

Anthony quickly interrupted her by putting his finger on her lips.

“Hush! hush! godmother, we might be overheard.”

“By whom? Sweet Jesus! the rabbits or the birds in the wood? Don't be afraid, you may depend on their discretion, as much as on mine. She is prettier still, is she not? and certainly you are as much in love as ever.”

“Aunt!”

“Well! Well! we won't speak about her, what about your father? What does he say?”

Anthony told her of his father's refusal and the embarrassment it caused him.

“Certainly!” said the old woman, “my brother is wrong. He is an upstart. I honour notaries, but every man in his place, I say. You would moulder in the midst of their paper and scribbling. Is it not much better to cultivate good mother earth, from which we all came, and to which we must all

return ; is she not ever willing to feed our children and grandchildren. I love the earth, and all those who like it. You have chosen the right path, godson ! Follow your plough in it."

" Godmother, I am happy to hear you speak thus, for in you rests my only hope."

" And I, certainly, should be happy to help you, but how can I do it ? I have nothing left, I am but an old beggar woman."

He interrupted her with an incredulous jesture.

" People speak differently, aunt. They say you have savings—hidden money."

" Lies ! " exclaimed the old woman, greatly moved, " they are lies ! I have nothing left but my house and a few bits of ground, which produce just a sufficiency for me to live upon. But savings ! money ! hidden money ! No, indeed, I have none. That money which is not employed remains useless, God curses it. It is taken from you. It is stolen from you ! and you are rightly served."

The old infirm peasant, when he spoke

to Anthony, alluded to the catastrophe to which Dame Certainly had been a victim. Years had passed since then, but in a peasant's heart, such wounds are never healed. The slightest remembrance makes the wound bleed afresh, and as painfully as ever. With a heartrending sigh and increasing irritation the poor old woman continued—

“ Yes ! formerly we had saved a large sum, 22,000f. They were buried, well-concealed, so we hoped, at least. They were taken from us—stolen ! The thief was condemned ; he was transported—he is there still—but that did not restore our money to us ! It broke my poor old man's heart ! When I think about it, I could cry my eyes out, grief, anger—”

Suddenly she stopped speaking, with her mouth wide open, her eyes fixed and flashing.

A woman, a young girl, appeared at the end of the path.

“ There ! ” said the old woman in a low voice, crouching like a wild animal ready to spring on its prey, “ there's the thief's daughter, the bandit's child—there she is.”



CHAPTER X.

THERESE.

SHE was a woodcutter, and one of the poorest in the village.

Her clothing consisted in an old brown woollen petticoat and an unbleached chemise. Her feet were bare, and her only head-gear was her magnificent black hair, which curled naturally, and partly fell on her shoulders. There was something strange and wild in her pale features, her resigned smile, and her anxious step. Looking steadily after the dead wood, she advanced with a hasty step, and without seeing, or rather recognising, those she was going to meet.

They were in the shade. She was almost blinded by a strong ray of light which, even more than her work, forced her to keep her eyes on the ground.

All of a sudden Dame Certainly stood before her, barring the footpath.

“Out upon you! thief’s daughter, convict’s child; go away! go away, cursed girl.”

Her threatening looks, her uplifted hands, seemed to call vengeance from heaven to aid her resentment.

The poor girl, stupefied and abashed, trembled with grief and fear.

“Madame, good Madame,” she stammered, “I am not guilty—I was but a baby at the time—it was no fault of mine.”

Far from pacifying Dame Certainly, her mildness increased her passion.

“She dares me!” she exclaimed, with increasing fury. “Oh, I could beat her! I could crush the serpent.”

Anthony vainly tried to pacify his aunt.

“This child is not answerable for her father’s crime,” said he. “She had not seen you, godmother. She is going away.”

Then, turning to the young girl, he said with the kindest of voice—

“Pray, Therese, leave us; go away.”

With a look of despair, Therese turned back into the wood.

It was high time she should do so, for the old woman fainted from emotion. When she came to herself again, abundant tears relieved her.

“Certainly, I was wrong,” she said, “but when I see her I become madly cruel. When I think that if it had not been for her father I should be rich, and I could help you, child—I would do it, certainly—I have confidence in you. There now, go to M. Durand; he has my title-deeds, and if by selling all that is left me, even my house, he can procure 10,000 francs—well and good. I will lend them—I will give them to you; but then you must take me to live with you, for, upon my honour, I shall not have a thing left.”

“Thank you, godmother; but I cannot consent to despoil you thus.”

And putting the faggot on his shoulder, he led her towards the village.

Therese, however, had not gone very far in the thicket.

Sitting at the side of a ditch, her face covered with her hands, she was crying bitterly.

From time to time, convulsed with sobs, lifting her eyes towards heaven, she exclaimed—

“Oh, God! kind Saviour! you know I am not guilty! When shall I be able to prove to them how unjust they are!”

Therese was right; the robbery had been committed by her father in the first days of her existence.

Previous condemnations, aggravating circumstances, had caused the maximum of penalty to be applied to him, twenty years' hard labour.

He never would confess what he had done with the money.

His wife was left in the greatest distress. She had borne it with stern energy, living alone, and without asking for help from any one, in a hut on the borders of the wood. It was a wonder how she had succeeded in bringing up her daughter.

The gossips and evil thinkers in the country were constantly saying—

“ She knows where the treasure is hid ; she takes money from it and lives upon it.”

The poor creature, overworked and starving, died from want.

Therese was barely grown up ; but habits of solitude, and the severe lessons of misfortune had prematurely ripened her. The species of reprobation to which she was subjected no longer made any impression upon her. As a child, she had had no friends, when a girl she had no companions. She was only employed, when hands were scarce, at hay-making, harvesting, and vintage.

Even then she was only tolerated, and when the day's labour was over she stood apart from the others. She merely went to the village to buy what she wanted ; and to the borough three or four times a year to sell the lace she had made. Her opportunities for exchanging a few words with her fellow creatures were very few. She liked her hut and the forest, and provided she was not insulted, she was satisfied with her fate.

When the Marquis and his daughter met

Therese they always spoke to her ; it was out of kindness. They knew how blameless her conduct was, and they would send for her to work at the Manor for several days at a time. She always went there neatly dressed ; she was humble, obedient, and worked hard. Her gratitude for the pity shown her was without bounds. No other encouragement was given her for her good behaviour, her existence was that of a pariah.

Her loveliness had attracted some of the village beaux. Knowing how defenceless she was, they fancied her an easy conquest ; but Therese kept them at a distance and forced them to respect her innocence. They were obliged to own that on that score at least she was honest.

A more serious danger threatened her. The new steward of the château, M. Thillard, an ex-Parisian *débauché*, feeling lonely in his retreat, had taken a fancy to the dark beauty of the woods. She would enliven his solitude, he thought. Who could be offended by this act ? Who would know it ? Thanks to his

situation, he possessed a certain degree of authority. He had money, and was a perfect *roué*. Any other girl than Therese would perhaps have fallen a prey to his arts; she resisted him.

Thillard, however, did not give up the game as lost; he employed persecution, cunning, and threats by turns. An unexpected protector came to her assistance.

This was a man of the name of Mathias, who had served in the Zouaves, where he had obtained the military medal. When he returned home with his *congé*, he found his parents were dead, and he cared very little for old acquaintances. He was very rarely seen at the public-house. As he was a hard-working man, he was very much sought for as a daily labourer; he spoke little, and kept company with no one. Some thought him shy, others proud. "He is a perfect bear," said the village coquettes, who no doubt had seen their labour lost in trying to attract him.

Mathias lived alone, just as Therese did; from thence proceeded a mutual sympathy,

but it was most discreet even on the Zouave's side. He scarcely ever spoke to her, and then only just to wish her good morning when he passed by her. But she had read in his eyes what she vainly sought for in others; esteem, a sort of pity, perhaps of affection, which only waited for an opportunity to show itself.

One evening, as she was returning from the wood, Therese was met by Thillard. He rushed towards her with the evident intention of folding her in his arms. Mathias suddenly appeared, seized hold of him by the collar, and throwing him against the trunk of an old oak tree, said—

“Do not dare to move! I will spare you this time—but don't try that game any more, or it will be a bad day's work for you. I shall watch;” and to the poor girl who had dropped her faggot—“Go home, Therese, you have nothing to fear.”

The steward was forced to choose another path, and he saw Mathias follow a third.

* * * * *

A few weeks after this incident it was the village *fête*.

Until then Therese had always avoided appearing there, but attracted by the sound of the music, the lights, that nameless feeling which speaks to the hearts of young girls, she came within sight of the dancers, so that she might at least see others amusing themselves. On looking round she perceived that Mathias was observing her.

“It is sad at your time of life,” said he, “to look on only, why don’t you dance?”

“Who would have me for a partner?” answered the convict’s daughter.

“I will—come.” He held out his hand, she gave him hers, and they entered the circle.

Just at that moment some one was asking for a *vis-à-vis*.

“Present!” said Mathias, and he placed himself with Therese.

There was a sudden rumour, roars of laughter, and all the other couples walked away.

“You see, they won’t admit me amongst them!” said Therese.

But Mathias was determined that things should not go on so. In a violent passion he had placed himself in the midst of the quadrille which had been formed further on.

“You are a set of scamps,” he exclaimed, “and I will not put up with such insults. As you will not let Therese dance, I will not allow any one else to do so !”

This threat caused a regular uproar, and a general battle ensued.

All the men rushed on Mathias, but he was courageous and strong, and he it was who beat the others.

When the gendarmes made their appearance, two or three of the wounded men having complained, they wrote out the *procès-verbal*.

Mathias appeared before the tribunal of simple police, presided over by M. Morisseau. This gentleman, much to his regret, was forced to condemn him to four and twenty hours' imprisonment.

“Poor Mathias !” said Therese, the first time she saw him, “you cannot imagine how

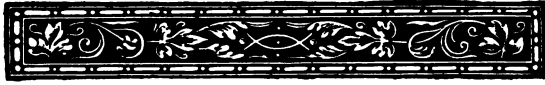
much I regret having been to the ball, when I think of what you suffered on my account."

"I am happy that it was for you!" and without any further explanation he walked off.

She had not seen him since after the scene with Mother Certainly, when Therese was sobbing under the trees, she suddenly heard his compassionate voice asking—

"Therese, what are you crying about?"





CHAPTER XI.

THE WILL.

MATHIAS was standing near her, with his pickaxe and shovel on his shoulder. Sincere affection could be read in his look.

“Why,” he once more asked, “why are you crying?”

Therese confided to him the cause of her sorrow.

“Will their cruelty never cease?” he exclaimed. “I could swear to it, you are a good and honest girl.”

Her looks thanked him for her.

“Come, now, wipe your eyes. I can’t bear to see you cry.”

Whilst taking her handkerchief out of her pocket she dropped a letter.

Mathias picked it up. When he returned it to her, she said—

“I think it comes from my father. He is the only person who ever writes to me.”

“I should think so, too,” said the ex-Zouave, examining the envelope which had not been opened; “it was stamped at Toulon.”

Therese blushed and remained silent a few moments, then she said—

“As I cannot read, I went to the curate’s this morning, to be made acquainted with its contents. He was absent; would you kindly read it to me?”

“Most willingly.”

He laid his tools on the ground, broke the seal and glanced over the first page.

“Poor Therese! another misfortune has befallen you!”

“Tell me quickly, what it is.”

“Your father—”

“What has happened to him?”

“Do not agitate yourself; be calm—he is dead!”

The convict’s daughter raised her large dark eyes to heaven.

“I scarcely knew him,” she murmured;

“but I have often prayed for him. May God forgive him ! Did he write that letter ?”

“He did indeed. Listen to it.”

Then Mathias read slowly the following lines—

“‘My child, I am very ill. Something whispers to me that I shall never recover. When all is over, a person who has shown me kindness will put this, my last will, in the post-office. How much you must have suffered on my account ! Forgive your poor father. I had hoped soon to return to you, then we should have shared together. As my heiress, the whole is yours.’

“What does this mean ?” she said.

Mathias turned the leaf over, and almost immediately exclaimed—

“Why have you given this letter to me to read ; it contains a secret ?”

“I do not regret my confidence ; pray, go on, Mathias.”

The ex-Zouave's voice trembled, as well as his hand, when he continued—

“ ‘The money lies buried in a spot I think you must know, at the foot of the Partisans’ Oak—not towards the glade, on the other side, towards the cope, between the two great roots—22,000 francs. I have earned them by seventeen years’ hard labour. They are mine—my inheritance. I leave them to you.’ ”

Therese started up ; her eyes sparkled.

“ God grant the whole sum may be there still. They shall soon see my poor mother never touched it. Come, Mathias, you have your tools ; let us go at once ; follow me.”

“ What is your intention, Therese ? ”

“ You shall soon know.”

And, trembling with impatience, she dashed into the wood.

The ex-Zouave followed her.

After running straight on for about a quarter of an hour, Therese came to the glade in which stood the oak.

The convict had chosen this tree because it was one of those one would never think of felling, age having rendered them sacred. Their gigantic trunks are hollow, but every

succeeding spring crowns their summit with leaves. They are the glory of the forest, considered as historical monuments.

The legend belonging to this tree was fearful. It reminded you of one of Callot's designs, "The Gibbet Oak." On the lower branches, during the civil wars, many an unfortunate being had been hung. During the long winter evenings frightful tales were related of the wandering souls who haunted the glade, and even in the day time few people ventured that way, so that the place bore a very bad name, and was deserted.

With one rapid glance, Therese convinced herself that nobody was in the neighbourhood to see or hear them.

A great quantity of brambles were entwined together behind the tree. She rushed towards them; tore her hands to pieces to separate them; then pointing to a space between two enormous roots growing on the surface of the soil, she said to Mathias—

"This, I think, must be the spot; we will search that first."

The young girl's excitement was shared by Mathias; he began digging.

The ground being hard and stony, they constantly met with fresh obstacles; the work proceeded slowly.

Therese, watching his labour with anxiety, constantly repeated, "Make haste; oh, pray do make haste."

The trench was already more than a yard deep, and as yet their search had been fruitless.

Suddenly, whilst removing a very large stone, his shovel, sliding under it, struck against something which gave a metallic sound.

Therese bounded into the trench, groped the earth with her hands, and gave a triumphant shout.

In her trembling hands she held a small coffer, covered with rust.

"This is it! This must be it!" she exclaimed. "Come, come along, Mathias. Come and see!"

And, carrying the treasure in her arms,

pressing it on her heart, she darted towards the village.

Mathias followed her, obeying some magnetic influence.

On the slope, at the entrance of the forest, some peasants were walking to and fro.

Some were measuring a field, others planting boundaries. A gentleman was surveying them.

Therese stopped for one instant, shading her eyes with her hand.

“It is the justice of peace!” she exclaimed. “God has, indeed, guided me.”

She started off once more, and in a few moments was standing before M. Morisseau.

“What do you want with me, child?” he enquired, astonished by her manner.

It was in vain for her to try and speak; no sound escaped her lips. At last, pointing to Mathias, she gasped—“the letter!”

He gave it to the magistrate.

When he had read it he looked at Therese. She presented the box to him, saying—

“There is the money!”



CHAPTER XII.

RESTITUTION.

ANTHONY had not left his godmother's house when a distant rumour, and then the sound of many voices approaching the house, reached them.

"What can be the matter?" exclaimed the old dame, looking for her spectacles.

Indifferent to all that was not his own sorrow, the young man had not moved, when M. Morisseau and his clerk appeared on the threshold.

Behind them came the schoolmaster and some of the inhabitants of the village, where this important piece of news had already spread.

In the middle of the group stood Mathias and Therese.

At the sight of the thief's daughter's auda-

city Dame Certainly could not refrain from an indignant gesture, a burst of passion.

But the magistrate interposing his authority, said—

“Stop! I brought Therese here, and when you have heard what I have to say, your sentiments will change towards her.”

Then turning to those who surrounded him he continued—

“You must all listen to me to be convinced that he alone who has committed a crime must bear the weight of it, and that it is very wrong to charge others with the load. We may inherit our parents' virtues, but we do not inherit their vices. Of this fact this young girl is a proof. You have had no pity on her mother—on herself—and yet you have seen how she fought against the perils to which your unjust reprobation has exposed her; it was that God had granted her great strength of mind and virtue.”

A smile of incredulity passed over Dame Certainly's features.

“This morning, dame, at the very moment

when you insulted and cursed her, she had received a letter from Toulon ; but Therese was ignorant of the contents of it, not having been allowed even to approach the school ; she cannot read. Listen now to what her father wrote to her."

He then read slowly, marking every word so that his auditors should fully understand, the convict's will, which ended, as you are well aware, by naming the place in which the money had been hidden.

A profound silence ensued, which lasted several minutes. Then a murmur passed among the assistants of this scene, for Dame Certainly had exclaimed—

“ The money ! Our money !

“ She might have kept it, and no one would ever have suspected it. The man who had read the letter to her was the only person who shared her secret. This is Mathias, her only friend ; he I was forced to punish for having taken her part. What was there to prevent their leaving this place together and being rich ? For them, this money was a fortune.

That thought did not even enter Therese's mind, that Mathias can tell you."

"Of that I can take God to witness!" hastily exclaimed the ex-Zouave.

The magistrate continued—

"Therese's conscience has been her sole adviser. Spontaneously, she came to restore it. She met me on the way and gave the box to me, here it is!"

Until that moment the clerk had kept it hidden under his cloak. He now placed it on the table.

"Dame Certainly, is that the coffer that was stolen from you?"

The old woman had already taken it in her trembling hands.

"Yes! yes! it is!" she exclaimed, unable to repress her joy, "yes! I recognise it. It is ours!"

Then she vainly tried to open it.

"Mathias break the box open," said M. Morisseau.

This was soon done. Gold and bank-notes were spread on the table.

“ Let us see if the sum is exact,” said the magistrate.

The schoolmaster and the clerk assisted in the verification. The amount was exact.

“ You, see now,” said Therese, “ how unjust you have been to accuse my mother ! ”

And her whole soul seemed bent on her rehabilitation.

“ Therese,” answered the magistrate, “ your mother was a good and honest woman, and you are worthy of being her daughter.”

A general acclamation confirmed these words. All came near Therese to congratulate her. The men bowed respectfully to her, all the women kissed her. Last of all came Dame Certainly, almost kneeling.

“ Therese,” she exclaimed, “ dear kind Therese, pray forgive and forget the past ! I here beg your departed mother’s pardon, and yours, for having so long misjudged you both ! ”

And as the young girl stooped to raise her, the old woman laid her hands on her head saying—

“ Child! The poor departed soul sees us, and I bless thee.” Then overwhelmed with emotion, Dame Certainly fell back fainting in Anthony's arms.

Morisseau sent the crowd out of the house ; the people obeyed, but in their enthusiasm cried out—

“ Long live Therese ! ”

Some of the men, amongst whom were the two dancers the ex-Zouave had so unmercifully thrashed, added—

“ And long live Mathias.”

He remained in the house.

Thanks to Therese's care, Dame Certainly soon opened her eyes. She looked about her like some one awaking from a dream, the sight of the broken coffer, the gold and notes reminded her of all that had passed. Therese pointed to them with a smile. The old woman threw her arms round the girl's neck and kissed her. Then she rose, and approaching her long lost treasure, so wonderfully recovered, she sighed, saying—

“ Why is my poor husband no longer

here? What can I do with so much money? Shall I hide it once more? Oh, no, indeed, that is unlucky. It might be taken from me again!"

Perceiving her godson, she added—

"Anthony, I will now fulfil my promise—it is yours—take it—I give it you."

"You lend it me, godmother, and I remember your conditions. You must come and live with me to see what becomes of it. But first of all we must reward Therese. What must I give her, M. Morisseau. It will be her dower."

The honest girl was refusing, when Mathias suddenly came forward.

"A dower for Therese! she does not require one to find a husband."

These words seemed to have escaped involuntarily from his lips, for he coloured and was unable to proceed.

Therese went to him and looked at him—

"Why do you not go on, Mathias," she said, with a modest but encouraging smile.

"I dare not."

She took his hand in hers, and looking up at him—

“Speak,” she said, “I have understood you—I guess what you would say.”

“There, my heart is my eyes. If you can read in them that I love you, and have done so a long time, so much the better, I shall not deny it.”

“Oh! that is my best and truest reward,” she exclaimed, hiding her blushes in his arms.

“Bravo! and you shall both come with me, and I will take care of you for the future. You approve of what I say, do you not, godmother?”

“Certainly! and on their wedding day, I will open the ball.”

“With me!” said M. Morisseau. “The banns shall be published at once.”

“The wedding shall take place at the large farm,” concluded Anthony. “Now that I can enter in possession, I will do so to-morrow.”



CHAPTER XIII.

THE STEWARD.

WE must now pay a visit to the Château de Navailles.

As I have already told you it is a splendid residence, but everything is neglected in it. The parterres have no flowers, the walks covered with grass. A few shutters only are opened in the front of the house. It bears that sad and melancholy aspect of uninhabited dwellings.

Since the departure of the Marquis, several proprietors have succeeded one another there.

Parvenus, stockbrokers, enriched one day and ruined the next by a liquidation or a bankruptcy. The estate had been for sale a very long time, when chance—the con-

struction of a railroad—had brought M. Maubray in the country.

He was a true millionaire. Unfortunately enterprises in many parts of France took up all his time. He was a bachelor, and had no relations. When he bought the estate he had formed great projects concerning it, but they had come to nought. He had scarcely ever been there since. Thillard, with whom you are already acquainted, was his agent. Anthony called him a bad man. His odious conduct towards Therese cannot be forgotten. Misfortune befell every poor girl in the village for whom he took a fancy, when they had no Mathias to protect them.

Nothing was known about him, excepting what he related himself in his drunken hallucinations. He had squandered a large patrimony in idleness and extravagance, then came poverty and the most hideous of all distresses, that of the *débauché*.

Maubray, who had been acquainted with him formerly, met with him at that time. He took pity on him. Thillard wanted to be

engaged in one of the enterprises of the great contractor, but he did not esteem him sufficiently to consent to it.

Maubray liked none but honest men, being honest himself, yet he was indulgent for all those who had seen life, and was easily prevailed upon to succour misfortune, or the companions of his youthful days. It was just at the time he had bought the estate of Navailles.

He was in want of an agent for the domain. There would be no responsibility. He might perhaps commit a few dilapidations; but this would be a trial, and Maubray had promised himself to watch over his ancient companion. He had no time to do so. Thillard, left to himself, made the worst use of his position. He raised money out of everything, and went to Paris every time his purse was full. There he soon emptied it. When he returned, soured by what he called his exile, he ill-used and overtaxed every one. Through his arrogance and vices he was execrated in the country. In fact he was a petty tyrant.

Two servants only lived with him at the Château: a sort of gardener who kept the grounds in slovenly order, and his wife Françoise, who did the same for the apartments. The agent was sitting in the dining-room. He is breakfasting alone, but he has already emptied two bottles of wine.

“Return to the cellar,” said he to Frances, “and bring me some of the best. This place is my Botany Bay. I am wearied to death; I must drink!

“What a life I lead! When I think that I was rich once. I had no luck; all slipped through my fingers, whilst that Maubray, who was penniless, now rolls in gold. Friends! Companions—a mockery. He fancies he has done a great deal for me by sending me down amongst these savages; a true penance. If I could only spend a week on the Faubourg Montmartre—that is life; but I have nothing to make money from; and not a farthing. The blockhead who wants to hire the large farm, was not sensible enough to understand I required

a premium. If I asked Maubray for a fresh advance, he would refuse it! Oh! if ever I meet with an opportunity—I will be revenged!”

“Some one wishes to speak to you,” said Frances, returning with the wine he had asked for.

“Who is it?”

“Anthony Froment.”

Thillard's eyes sparkled.

“The farmer! Show him in, and bring a glass.”

“He comes to it at last,” said he, rubbing his hands.

Anthony walked in.

“You have not breakfasted, I am certain,” said the steward; “you must keep me company. Things are better settled over a good breakfast; and I believe it to be the fashion in the country.”

“It is not mine, I thank you,” answered Anthony.

“Then take a glass of wine with me. It is excellent. Our cellar is famous.”

The young man refused.

“I came about the lease.”

“Ah! ah! You know M. Maubray's conditions, and mine?”

“Allow me—”

The steward would not let him proceed.

“How raw you are. I expected to have sharpened your wits by saying things outright, besides doing you a service, sir. You must not pretend to virtue with me; it is out of fashion. You must arrange matters with me alone.”

“But, M. Maubray.”

“M. Maubray is an old schoolfellow of mine, and my friend. He has full confidence in me, and I deserve it. Ah! you smile; then you understand at last, and consent. I am not exacting—a thousand francs premium. I will be even with you, on my honour. I will be blind whenever you wish it. I will protect you, young man. So much the worse for the landlord; he is rich!”

Anthony could scarcely contain his indignation. Without seeming to hear him, without

giving him an answer, he took his pocket-book, and opened it.

Thillard held out his hand, saying,

“The agent’s share, is it not?”

“It is the lease, sir; signed by the landlord. I have seen him in Paris.”

“Confound you!” exclaimed Thillard, in a frenzy of passion; “if the master builder, the terrasse maker, has insulted me in this way—”

“What did you say?” asked a person on the threshold.

The agent, whose back was turned to the door, looked round, and remained dumb-founded.

A tall man, with an intelligent and sarcastic physiognomy, a grey beard, a bald high forehead, had been standing there for some moments.

He, no doubt, had heard the whole conversation.

It was M. Maubray.

Thillard’s fright and confusion were so great, that he would willingly have crept anywhere, out of sight.

Without even regarding his disloyal agent, the contractor walked up to Anthony, and shook hands with him.

“I can understand now why you called on me,” he said. “Pray forget all this; I will take you to the farm myself, and install you there. Allow me first to speak to M. Thillard.”

Anthony left the room.

The steward looked woefully at his master. “Forgive me,” he stammered; “I confess to *flagranti delicto*. I had drunk too much; wine spoke, not I.”

Maubray struck him on the face with his glove.

“Scoundrel! will you never alter?” said he. “I ought to turn you out of my house; but what would become of you then? What could you do? I consent, once more, to overlook your conduct; but remember, it will be the last time.”

The humbled and wily wretch was now going to pour forth his gratitude, when M. Maubray interrupted him, saying with severity—

“The first complaint against you will find me inexorable. It is a wrong thing to give any power to such beings as you. If ever I, personally, have cause to repent for having done so, it will serve me right. When I was poor you befriended me formerly. I have not forgotten it, but I conscientiously believe I have paid you my debt. I have once more warned you. Do not forget, henceforth, you represent me. I will allow no abuse, no vileness.”

Thillard looked up, and said, “I will obey you, believe me, henceforward.”

“Say no more; when we met you were houseless and pennyless; for the sake of our former friendship do not force me to throw you back to the miserable condition with which you were then threatened. Stop on the fatal path! There is time to do so yet; it is easy for you if you will, for I really wish to be of use to you. You have a good salary; a château for your residence, and you live well in it I see. Be satisfied with the present, and redeem the past.”

By degrees the contractor's features had lost their severity; kindness and indulgence lighted them up. He placed a few gold coins on the table, "These are for your cigars," said he. "I must not have come here merely to scold you. I will have no thanks—your actions will be sufficient. Good-by! I must go, for I am in a hurry."

And without even touching his old companion's hand, he disappeared.

* * * * *

As long as Thillard could fear to be seen by M. Maubray an obsequious grimace dwelt on his face; but he no sooner found himself alone, quite alone, than he resumed his seat, and with a threatening look and gesture, exclaimed—

"I must and will be revenged on him."





CHAPTER XIV.

A MASTER.

M. MAUBRAY had come in a postchaise. Anthony went to the farm in it with him. He was no longer the same man. Thillard had made him cross and uncomfortable; the contact of Anthony restored him to his natural disposition, which was cordial and kind.

“I have taken advantage of this opportunity to look over everything with you—I like you; I like all enterprising people, and your youth is far from disquieting me. In America, where I lived for some time, young men direct large enterprises, and succeed. You, I am certain, will do so likewise.”

“At least, I will do my best,” modestly answered Anthony.

M. Maubray offered him a cigar, and lit one himself.

“This country is really splendid, but very backward. I had bought the Château, with the hope of transforming it. But I have so little time to call my own; I am so constantly occupied. You shall be my lieutenant—and your captain will help you by every means in his power. I have already begun.”

“How so, sir?”

“Manure and cattle are most wanted here. The day before yesterday I was in the East, contracting for a railway branch. There I bought five hundred sheep for you. They are on their way here. After to-morrow I must be in Normandy—another railroad, some docks at Havre de Grace. From thence I will send you cows, guano. If you are short of money, mine is at your disposal, draw upon me.”

All this was said cordially, simply—without the least patronising accent. The contractor was a man of business, nothing more. One glance across the country had made him

acquainted with its wants, and the hopes it held out. He was a bold man, but he saw things clearly and soundly. His greatest genius was loyalty.

Anthony's thanks were tempered by a few observations. He was afraid of going too far.

"But these are your own plans; your ideas," said Maubray. "You confided them to me; I act upon them—that is all. If we place confidence in one another, everything will go right. Why have I not a son of your age?"

* * * * *

They had now reached the farm. Two young men of about twenty years of age, who, no doubt, had caught sight of the carriage at a distance, now came to meet it.

"These are Gervais' sons," said Anthony.

"Was he not the late farmer?"

Anthony bowed assent.

"He was an ignorant and a lazy man. He died just at the close of his lease, which I certainly should not have renewed. His sons, I believe, did not care about it."

“They are not gifted with an excess of intelligence; but they are strong and willing. With a better direction they would make excellent labourers.”

Anthony then left the carriage.

“Baptist, James—how do you do? I thought you had left the farm?”

“We waited to deliver the keys up to you,” answered James.

“We thought of going to-morrow,” added Baptist, with a sigh.

“Then you regret the farm?”

“No, it is the country.”

“Have you leased anything elsewhere?”

“No, indeed! we intend working for other people; that is by far the safest plan.”

“Then, why should you not remain with me?”

The brothers looked delighted.

“Would you keep us?”

“Certainly! as my godmother says. If you are willing, it is agreed upon. To-morrow we begin ploughing. We must make up for lost time.”

M. Maubray was just coming up to them.

“Will you have hands enough?” he inquired.

“I have already engaged two others, and they will be the best.”

“But you require a confidential person—a woman to keep your house.”

“Precisely; Mdme. Mathias and her husband, an honest, laborious, and clever man.”

Then the young farmer related Therese's history to M. Maubray.

“A truly fine action,” said he; “you can depend upon such people. They deserve to be encouraged, and I will send them my wedding present.”

“Besides,” said Anthony, “here I am, and, if it is necessary, I shall willingly contribute my share to the ploughing.”

“Bravo, Anthony! by giving the example yourself, you will have good labourers about you, who will attach themselves to your fortune. If you could but see me amongst my men. Mud and plaster do not frighten me; I tuck up my sleeves and prove to

them that I am worthy of being their master, by becoming by turns mason, carpenter, and terrasse maker, as Thillard called me."

Conversing thus, they visited the stables, the barns, the cow-sheds. Very few animals belonging to the farm remained there.

"I must go to the fair next week," said Anthony.

Maubray also was forming a thousand plans for improving and enlarging the farm; these were to be accomplished at once.

"I am contractor for the works of the new railroad. They are to begin immediately in the valley near this place. My engineer shall pay you a visit. He shall send you some choice workmen—my zouaves of the trowel and mattock, as I call them. You shall see the rogues at work! It will be done by enchantment. In our age all must be done by steam!"

Anthony was delighted with his landlord.

"How kind you are, sir."

"With those I like," answered Maubray.
"Besides, your rent will be increased in con-

sequence—that has been foreseen by the lease. I improve my farm, and do myself a service ; I am only placing money. Do not be afraid ; all will be just and fair between us. Don't fancy me a benefactor of humanity ; I am a speculator, and very fond of gain—so some will tell you. Only I have a certain respect for what belongs to others. I like to see all around me working and making money ; it is my interest. But when things go wrong ; when I am in one of my bad days—and that often happens—you would not recognise me ; I am not worth a fig.”

In fact, with such a man, kind and generous, but quite as energetic, anger must have been a dreadful thing. Such is the character of all those possessed by the feverish activity of modern industry. They are like steam engines running at full speed ; the obstacle which they cannot break overturns them. With the least compression they burst.

After this burst of feeling Maubray began smiling once more, and looked at his watch.

“ We must make haste now,” said he, “ for

I have just time sufficient left to pay a visit at the Manor."

"Did you not tell me you knew the Marquis of Navailles?"

"He honours me with a little friendship."

"Will you be kind enough to introduce me to him?"

"Most willingly."

"Tell the postillion which way he must go, if you please, and let us start."

On the road M. Maubray said to Anthony—

"I am going to the Manor for a very foolish affair. It is Thillard's fault. I really am too weak with him. But perhaps you know all about it?"

"Not in the least," answered Anthony.

"I am happy to find the Marquis has not laughed at me too much. You shall assist at the interview, then you will know all."

At a short distance from the Manor the postillion was ordered to stop, for Maubray was desirous of avoiding a noisy arrival.

When the two gentlemen walked into the court-yard, they found Ambroise there.

“Is the Marquis at home?” asked Anthony.

“Yes, sir,” answered the old manservant. “The ladies are gone for a walk without him. He is in the drawing-room. I will announce you. Do not make any noise, if you please ; I think he is asleep.”

Followed by the two visitors, Ambroise ascended the steps of the perron, entered the hall, and without making the least noise, pushed the drawing-room door open.





CHAPTER XV.

MAUBRAY DE NAVAILLES.

THE drawing-room at the Manor was immense, and overlooked the garden and the court-yard. The wainscoting, painted in carmine, but discoloured by time, served as a frame to goblin tapestry, equally faded.

The furniture, kept with the greatest care, dated from Louis the Fifteenth. It was so exact one might have thought one's self in one of the residences of that epoch. Here and there a few family portraits were to be seen.

On a couch, near one of the windows, the Marquis slumbered; the *Gazette de France* lay on his knees.

A ray of the setting sun was playing on his snowy white hair.

The noise made by Ambroise's footsteps awoke him; and before the servant had found time to speak he had recognised Anthony.

"You, is it, my lad? Come in; but you are not alone—who have you brought with you to visit me?"

"M. Maubray," said the young man, introducing the contractor.

The old gentleman, taken by surprise, rose slowly to return his bow.

Then with a malicious smile, he said—

"Maubray de Navailles."

"Do not be too severe, sir; I was wrong; I own it, and have come myself to beg of you to accept my excuses."

The Marquis offered him a seat.

Placed in a false position, Maubray had however, shown himself to be a perfect gentleman.

"I myself would never have thought of such a thing," said he, taking a chair. "A vile flatterer, wishing to gratify my vanity, added the name of the estate to that of the

owner. And what astonishes me most, I made no protestation—the folly of a *parvenu*—besides, I was not aware there were any Navailles remaining. M. Morisseau's letter brought me to my senses. Such a name as yours is a property, and commands respect; and if even no one was left to defend it, no one has a right to touch it. It belongs to history. What remained of those horrid cards has been thrown in the fire. I have once more become plain Maubray."

Nothing could be more frank and loyal than this declaration. The Marquis was completely won by it.

"I feel obliged to you for your visit; such frankness nobly redeems a slight fault. I am quite satisfied with the reparation. We must forget all about it."

"Pardon me, my lord," said Maubray, "I have made use of another man's property. Every abuse should be paid for, or at least, indemnified."

"My name is no more to be let than it is to be sold," answered the Marquis, proudly.

“ I really am unfortunate,” said the millionaire, angry with himself. “ I have unwillingly committed a fresh impertinence. Once more forgive me ! But can I do nothing to be agreeable to you ? ”

After hesitating a little, the Marquis replied—

“ The estate is yours, sir, but your agent is much less liberal towards the poor country-people, the wood-pickers, than was the custom in my time. You would oblige me by recommending a little more leniency towards them.”

“ That, sir, was my own wish. I will write to Thillard about it.”

Then turning to Anthony, he added—

“ Our friend Froment has taken the lease of the large farm. As fast as the others are untenanted they are to return to him. He is to have the whole domain, and I beg of him to manage so that the population may believe the Navailles to be still owners of the estate. I am one of those who believe that ‘ Riches also oblige.’ Now, as I am determined to

fine myself, you will, I hope, allow me to send the money to M. Morisseau for the poor of the parish."

"That is unfair," exclaimed the old gentleman. "You are now taking the best part."

Maubray had risen to depart.

"Will you allow me to take away with me the hope that you have forgiven me, sir?"

The Marquis held out his hand to him, and forcing him to resume his seat, questioned him as to the railroad they were to have, and on Anthony's grand plans.

"All progresses follow one another," said the contractor, "and you will soon do us the justice to acknowledge that, if we now have our share in the land, its value, riches, and public prosperity are increased by it. Anthony and I represent modern ideas, which have not, as yet, penetrated in this part of the country. We are determined that in the space of ten years, not one acre of barren land shall remain in it; the produce, thanks to the railroad, will be easily exported. In exchange the conquests of civilisation, its

benefits and enlightenment will be the share of the poorest peasant."

"Do you think they will be any the happier for it?" doubtfully asked the nobleman.

"Undoubtedly," replied the convinced contractor. "Now-a-days everything transforms itself, and improves through science and labour. It is not in vain that steam and electricity have been applied to the wonderful discoveries of our age. It will complete its work by giving instruction and comfort to all men of good will. All powers, even the nobility, must concur to this end."

"Permit me! You have forced us to abdicate."

"Your privileges," respectfully said Maubray, "but not your duties. It is impossible to abdicate the right of being useful to others."

He stopped out of deference to the Marquis, and almost regretting what he had just said, added—

"There now, my lord, once more I have run the risk of offending you."

“Not at all. Besides, if I am not mistaken, I have seen some of our great names in industry, agriculture, and even amongst cattle breeders. I do not blame—”

“Do better still, imitate them.”

“You forget I am nearly eighty—and that I am poor. But if I am no longer able to go and conquer the Golden Fleece, my heart and good wishes accompany the Argonauts. A pleasant voyage, gentlemen, and good fortune.” With this rather sarcastic conclusion from the Marquis, they parted, delighted with one another.

As the two visitors were returning to their postchaise, they met Irene and Susan, who were coming back to the Manor.

Anthony stopped to speak to them; Maubray bowed and passed on. Discretion had not been his only motive, he wished to conceal the sudden start of surprise he had not been able to master.

At a short distance he turned to look at Susan, as if he could not believe his own eyes.

“Who are those ladies?” he asked of Anthony, when the latter joined him.

“The youngest is Mdlle. de Navailles. Is she not handsome?”

“Yes, most lovely; but who is the other?”

“Formerly her governess, now her friend, an excellent creature, a perfect saint!”

“What is her name?”

“Susan Aubert.”

“Ah!” said Maubray, evidently moved.

“Do you know her?” enquired Anthony.

“No—a sort of vague recollection.”

“Just like her, then!”

“What do you mean?”

“Just now, when I mentioned your name, Susan started.”

“Indeed?”

“And Mdlle. Irene having noticed it, Susan told her she fancied she had met you formerly.”

“Yes, yes, just so!” said Maubray, affecting indifference. “It is so long ago! But I do not wish to miss the train. Come, let us make haste!”

Whilst his companion got into the carriage, he once more looked towards the Manor, which Susan had just reached.

She also was looking after Maubray.

“She! is it she really? oh! I will return here.”

He then gave his orders to the postillion, and the horses started at full gallop.





CHAPTER XVI.

THE FARM.

Six months have elapsed, we are now in the middle of spring. No one could recognise the large farm. New buildings have been constructed, the old ones repaired.

According to M. Maubray's promise, it is a complete metamorphosis, which has been performed by enchantment. Activity, improvement, and order reign in the interior. The farm not only belongs to this age, but is in progress with it.

The same transformation is met with in the fields. Numerous labourers animate them. They are cultivated by the new methods, and promise a magnificent harvest.

In the large sitting room Dame Certainly is spinning, Therese preparing the repast. She is no longer the miserable, wild wood

gatherer. Her beautiful dark hair is nicely braided under a snowy white cap, and the remainder of her costume corresponds with her head-dress. The confidence and gaiety natural to her youth have returned to her. She looks perfectly happy. She has become Mdme. Mathias.

Quite unexpectedly M. Morisseau appeared on the threshold.

“Good morning, dame; how do you do, Therese? where is Anthony?”

“He has been in the fields ever since daylight,” answered the old lady.

“He will soon return now,” said Therese, continuing to lay the cloth.

“Add two plates, child,” said the magistrate, “for I invite myself.”

“Two plates! why, you are alone, M. Morisseau!”

“Somebody else will soon join me. Do as I bid you.”

He then seated himself near the dame.

“Well, godmother, how are things going on; are you satisfied?”

“Most certainly I am! Anthony is so industrious, so clever. All succeeds with him. God blesses him.”

“So you have not one regret—one wish?”

“Indeed, we have, sir—and you can easily guess what it is.”

“Not quite. What is it?”

“What should it be but his father’s consent. Would you believe it, sir, notwithstanding our real success, that obstinate old man has never yet set his foot within these doors.”

“Have patience, dame, a little patience.”

Just then Therese called out—

“Here comes master!”

Returning from the fields, Anthony gave his horse to the ostler, and walked towards the house.

M. Morisseau went to meet him at the door.

“How kind of you to have come, sir,” said the farmer.

Satisfaction lighted up a countenance to which the open air, the ride, health and youth

had imparted the freshest hue. His very appearance was prosperity.

“How triumphant you look,” said M. Morisseau.

“Is it not natural? Am I not leading the life I longed for. At dawn I started on my rounds. I have seen to the ploughing, the cattle, the labourers myself; and set all a going. I am really favoured—how beautifully the sun shines. Every one strives to please me. I have but to say—‘I wish you to do this so,’ and if advice is not sufficient, I set about the work myself. I have done a great deal this morning, so that all, even my appetite, is in order. Can you say as much, godmother?”

When he had kissed her, he noticed the cloth Therese was laying.

“Ah! I am happy to see M. Morisseau favours us with his company.”

“He even wants two places,” answered Mdme. Mathias.

“Does Mdlle. Agathe honour us?”

“Not to-day, I have just left her at the

Manor. But coming along we took up some one, whose visit will be still more agreeable."

"Who can that be?"

"Guess!"

"I cannot."

"Then turn round and look!"

The *juge de paix* had pointed to the yard, there Anthony perceived M. Froment.

"Father!" he exclaimed, running out to meet the old man. He seized him by his arms, forced him into the house, and seated him in the arm chair Dame Certainly had just left. Then kneeling before him, his eyes filled with joyful tears, he said—

"Dear father, you have forgiven me at last?"

"Not yet, not yet," answered the old man.

"M. Morisseau had spoken so much about this farm, that I was determined to see—and I have seen."

"He has been walking about your grounds for the last two hours, Anthony."

"Are you satisfied, father?"

The old man hesitated.

“Why do you not say ‘certainly!’” queried the godmother.

“Your wheat is very fine. There has never been any like it in the country before.”

“And my artificial meadows—and the cattle?”

“Certainly, but that all must cost heaps of money! What is that they are replanting in that ground, so carefully ploughed, and which runs out to such an extent?”

“It is colewort, father.”

“I had heard it spoken of, but had never seen any. It has never been cultivated in these parts. But for a trial, I say, you have not been sparing—thirty acres!”

“It is as good as ready money, father.”

“We shall see.”

Every one stood listening to this conversation between the father and his son.

“Will you not grant me the slightest encouragement?”

The obstinate old man avoided answering.

“Your M. Maubray must have advanced

you an immense deal of money. Are you certain you will not regret the bargain ?”

“ Yes, father—he has large and generous ideas—and we have faith in one another.”

“ Do you see him often ?”

“ As to that, no, I do not. Since last autumn he has not been here. But I expect him in a few days. Now come, father, have confidence in your son, and kiss me !”

After a short silence, the old man said—

“ Willingly, but that does not engage me in any way. We must not forget our agreement. I have granted you two years' trial, under promise that if I do not authorise you to continue, you will give up your hobby and become a notary.”

“ On my honour I once more promise you to do so.”

Anthony held out his arms to him. Then the icy coldness in which the old man seemed to have wrapped his heart, melted, and he fondly kissed his son. Suddenly, as if ashamed of his own weakness—

“Come, come,” said he, “let us sit down to dinner, it is on the table.”

Therese now received her share of compliments, for the dinner was excellent. Whilst she was preparing the food that was to be sent to the labourers in the fields, Anthony said to her—

“John has just been telling me that he was suffering a great deal from the fall he had last night; he ought not to be allowed to go so far.”

“Certainly not, sir.”

“Had you not better call Martine?”

Martine was the dairy-maid.

“I want her at the farm.”

“Who is to carry the dinner, then?”

“It will be fetched from the fields.”

“Who is to come for it?”

Therese pointed to her husband, who had just entered the farm-yard.

“I understand,” said Anthony, smiling.

“Is it not natural?” replied she, going to meet Mathias, to whom she entrusted the labourers' dinner, and happy with this op-

portunity of pressing his hand, she returned joyfully to wait on her masters.

“What a good thing it is to be young,” exclaimed Dame Certainly.

After dinner the farm was visited all over.

M. Froment's heart was softened by the good wine he had been drinking, and he now frankly admired everything, much to M. Morisseau's amusement.

In the afternoon the Marquis joined them, escorted by Irene and Agathe. With their light muslin dresses and white parasols, the young girls were indeed lovely.

Anthony had never looked so happy. The young ladies treated him like a friend; both congratulated him on his success, on his father's visit.

“You must feel very happy, Anthony,” said Agathe.

“It is indeed the happiest day in my life, Mademoiselle.”

His look was so tender and joyful, whilst he said this, that without knowing why herself, Agathe was quite agitated.

“You are changing the whole aspect of the land,” said Irene, “making your own fortune, and increasing the revenues of the country.”

“I hope so, for I also put confidence in my star.”

“Are you ambitious, then?” asked Agathe, with a smile.

“Very!” replied he, looking at her.

Agathe blushed, an unknown feeling was awakening in her heart.

“You have promised me seeds for my garden, and eggs for my poultry-yard,” she said, wishing to change the conversation.

“Therese is preparing them. In the meantime will you walk into the dining-room; I believe you will find cream and cakes there.”

“Come Irene, come along!” and to hide her blushes Agathe led her friend towards the house.





CHAPTER XVII.

SURPRISES.

THERESE was an active housekeeper. With the help of Martine, every trace of dinner had disappeared. Not a grain of dust, a crumb of bread were left on the floor. The furniture had been rubbed, and the sun, shining through the window that had been left open, made everything look bright with cleanliness. The shutters of the other window had been closed, so that the table might be in the shade. On a table-cloth as white as snow, china cups, a jug of cream, and a plate of pastry were laid. Everything so splendidly clean you might have fancied yourself in a Dutch farm-house.

The two young visitors seated themselves, and Therese waited on them attentively. She had given Agathe the seeds and eggs which had been promised her.

On each envelope the name of the seed was written.

“This is Anthony’s handwriting,” she said.

“Of course!” answered Therese, “he arranged it all himself—he always keeps his promises—and so kind! so devoted! his wife will be a happy woman, I can assure you.”

Agathe blushed, Therese seeming to address herself especially to her. She was a wife now, and had guessed Anthony’s secret; wishing to show her gratitude for past kindness, she tried to sound Agathe.

“Does he think of getting married?” asked Irene.

“Not just yet; but he will, and soon I hope. He is not one of those men who remain single long. Everybody speaks well of him in these parts. He is an honour to the department, and will certainly become rich—he is so good-looking, so brave, and so good tempered! What I call a man, and who has not his equal in the world—excepting Mathias!”

Agathe became thoughtful. It was Irene who answered, smiling—

“We can easily believe you, and we have the greatest esteem for your master. Do you think he has any young lady in the neighbourhood in view?”

“Why,” said Therese, who had not ceased observing Agathe. “I could almost swear to it. But from the want of a little encouragement, he dares not risk himself—he hides his feelings. Gentlemen, young ladies, are like peasants, the more truly they love, the less they speak about it. But if you only observe them well, you can read it in their eyes, even when you can't read in books.”

“Her own history has taught her all this—however, she certainly is right,” continued Dame Certainly, “ugly or pretty, ignorant or clever, poor or rich, every girl has a heart—which slumbers, like that of the Sleeping Beauty, until Prince Charming knocks at the door of the manor, or of the cottage. You must all have yours; if he has not come yet, he will some day—Mathias was Therese's—

He does not always arrive from distant countries—often he is very near—still it has never entered your mind. One word, a look even is sufficient to startle you, and to force you to say—‘It must be—it is he!’”

Anthony now joined them, his hands were filled with roses and lilacs.

“What beautiful flowers you have here!” said Agathe, with a smile.

“I remembered you liked them, young ladies,” he answered, “and the day after my installation here, I bought rose trees, and all sorts of plants from town. If our garden was taken care of as yours is, Mdlle. Agathe, it would be exactly like it.”

“A garden also; why this farm is like a little paradise.”

“You are not astonished, then, at people living in the midst of fields?”

“Astonished! not I indeed; I have often wished to live on a farm myself. It is one of my dreams.”

Unwittingly, Agathe was following Therese’s advice.

“What delicious cream, and excellent pastry,” said Irene.

“I am glad you like it, Mademoiselle, for I made it,” said Mdme. Mathias, delighted to see her hints had not been lost on Mdle. Morisseau, and that she was beginning to understand Anthony.

* * * * *

The Marquis and M. Morisseau were pacing the yard together.

Now and then they stopped at the door, and looked into the room.

“How lovely your daughter is getting, Morisseau,” said the Marquis, after one of these halts.

“*La beaute du diable*,” answered Morisseau, “youth!”

“Don’t speak in that way, wicked father! With her fair hair, her rosy cheeks, her frank smile, she looks like a cherubim. She is as fresh as a spring morning. I have never seen her look so handsome. Anybody can tell she is happy. I cannot say as much for my

granddaughter," he continued with a sigh. "She looks pale, sad, and worn out. Without telling her so, I consulted the doctor. He advised amusement, dissipation; and there is so little at the Manor. What is to be done? I have, however, contrived a surprise for her."

"What is it?"

"I will tell you when Anthony comes; he is necessary to the accomplishment of it."

The old gentleman then called him, and they walked away from the house.

"I want you to do something for me, Anthony."

"Most willingly, sir; I am never so happy as—"

"Hush! hush! it is a secret. Bernard arrives to-night."

"Does he indeed?"

"During his absence, he has worked a great deal for the exhibition. Claude Guérin sends him to us to rest, besides which, change of air will do him good. He takes the express which arrives at the village at

two o'clock in the morning. That would be rather early for me; and if I send Ambroise something might be suspected. Will you go and fetch him?"

"Certainly! Dear Bernard! how glad I shall be to see him."

"Now, just hold your tongue, chatterbox; you will both arrive at the Manor at day-break; I will meet you myself for more security. When Irene and Susan awake, the first person they will meet shall be our artist. That is the surprise I have managed for them."

"You may depend upon me, sir," said Anthony.

* * * * *

When the visitors left, M. Froment joined M. Morisseau and his daughter in their conveyance.

"I shall soon pay you another visit," the old man said to his son.

"So shall we!" added Agathe. "Good-by, Anthony. *Bon courage!*"

“I shall not want for any now, Mademoiselle.

“I have begun paying my debt to him,” said Therese to herself.

* * * * *

The Marquis and his granddaughter returned to the Manor. The evening was spent in the usual way, for there, unfortunately, all evenings were alike.

M. de Navailles retired to rest very early; Irene and Susan hastened to follow his example.

Old people generally sleep very little, especially when they have anything on their mind. It was quite dark when the Marquis awoke. He lit his lamp, and rose without making any noise. The clock was striking three.

“I have got up too early,” thought he. “The travellers are on the way, but at a great distance yet. I will go downstairs all the same, and see the sun rise.”

Treading as noiselessly as possible, he

reached the hall, sat the lamp on the stairs, unlocked the door, and walked out.

Bryan XIV. ran up to him, barking joyfully.

“Be still, good dog; let us keep our secret. Luckily youth sleeps so soundly that Irene cannot have heard us.”

He then opened the outer gate and walked on to the road.

The stars were beginning to disappear. A slight haze enveloped the silent country.

It had been one of those mild May nights, which generally freshen at the approach of dawn. The old man walked about to keep his blood in circulation. He returned into the yard, and, keeping close to the house, he went into the garden.

A grandfather's affection has something of the lover in it; the Marquis's first look was for Irene's bedroom window.

A light was burning there.

“She is ill!” he exclaimed with anxiety, “for some time past I have noticed how pale she looks. Not to agitate me, she has con-

cealed her sufferings. Heaven! if it prove dangerous! Oh! I must see her at once."

He ascended the staircase without even taking his lamp, and reached the first floor.

Bryan followed him silently. Well bred hounds know when they must be quiet. The room which preceded Irene's bedroom was open.

"How singular!" thought the old man, advancing towards the other door and listening. He heard and recognised the voices of Irene and Susan. Then at intervals a slight and quick rustling.

"What is that? what can that be?"

He suddenly opened the door.





CHAPTER XVIII.

WHY IRENE WAS SO PALE.

IRENE'S mysterious labour had continued during the whole winter.

How could she do otherwise? The Marquis, who did not even suspect their extreme penury, continued giving and spending.

Irene had remained silent, fearing that if he were informed of the entire truth the shock would be too great for him. So that by dint of economy and lace-making she had piously preserved all his illusions.

Susan not only protected her devotedness, but shared her labour.

Almost every night, and often until daylight, two unknown lace-makers worked dexterously. That was the noise the Marquis heard.

At first the conversation had been upon Bernard.

“What a time it is since he wrote,” said Irene.

“Perhaps we may hear from him to-day,” answered Susan. “In his last letter Claude Guérin he led us to hope we should have his visit before the end of the month. I have a foreboding we shall soon see him.”

The two ladies remained silent for some time. They were thinking of the absent one and working as fast as possible.

“I am cold,” said Irene; “chilled to my very heart. You were speaking of forebodings. That of a misfortune has just crossed my mind. Hark! did you not hear a door shut downstairs?”

“No; it is the wind whistling through the trees.”

Just then Bryan barked.

“Some one passing on the road,” said the governess, replying to a mute interrogation of her pupil, who had again started. “You hear; nothing moves, all is silent.”

The dog had effectively ceased barking; we have already seen why.

“You have worked enough, child. You do not look well; you must go to your rest, and sleep.”

“Not yet, Susan; the nights are so short now. I must first finish this flower. It will be done in a quarter of an hour.”

Susan fetched a pelisse and laid it on Irene's shoulders.

“Thank you. We shall not require to work much longer now. Summer is coming, and then the expenses are much less. Some very lucky thing may turn up. The star of the Navailles, according to grandfather's sayings.”

She continued working with greater activity.

“Poor grandfather! if ever he guessed. No, no; our finances will soon be balanced, and he will neither have known nor suspected anything. He is calm and happy.”

The young girl smiled at this thought, which gave her fresh courage.

Suddenly the door opened, and the Marquis appeared on the threshold.

Irene and Susan were thunderstruck.

Their stupor was so great that neither of them thought of hiding the lace cushion they had on their knees.

The old man was no less astonished. A sudden light flashed across his mind.

“That, then,” said he sorrowfully, “is the secret cause of your fatigue and palor; you work every night.”

“But this lace is for me,” she said, rising.

“No! I am certain it is not; for then you would not have hidden yourself; you would work in the day time, and before everybody. I understand it all now. A thousand circumstances strike me—your lectures on economy. We are poorer than even I thought we were. It is to earn a living for me.”

Irene vainly tried to deny it.

“Susan,” said he, turning to the governess, “you have never told a falsehood. I entreat of you to tell me the truth.”

“Yes; you are right,” she answered.

“But no one need blush about it. There was a little penury in the house. This laudable inspiration came to Irene, and I thought it proper to help her. We make lace, we sell it; but nobody knows anything at all about it.”

Irene tried to smile.

“But now that my budget is balanced,” she added, “we shall not work any longer.”

The poor old gentleman sobbed despairingly.

“Money! it was to earn money,” he exclaimed. “A Navailles—and I squandered it, notwithstanding her remonstrances, her prayers. Poor Irene; I shall never forgive myself.”

His granddaughter had seated him in an arm chair, and strove to console him by her kisses and affectionate entreaties; but he remained deaf to all she could say, and cried like a child.

At last she exclaimed—

“Grandfather, I have sworn I will not do it again; I have pledged my word as a

Navailles! Do you wish me to destroy my cushion? You have only to say so."

"No, indeed!" he answered, recovering serenity. "No! for it is your title to glory, and its value is as great as that of any of the family! It shall be placed amongst the trophies of our ancestors. You also have fought, bravely fought. Poverty is an enemy. Those spindles are your arms; that cushion your shield. I will keep them as relics, have them constantly before my eyes, to remember to be wiser! My child! my beloved child! the honour of the family has revived in thee. Never! no, never, did I feel so proud of you!"

"Then you forgive me, grandfather?"

"Forgive you! I love and admire you."

Saying this, he pressed her in his arms.

Bryan barking suddenly, interrupted them. The faithful animal was near them.

During the preceding scene he had been first to one and then to the other, licking their hands when they cried. Now he seemed to fear some danger for them.

The Marquis, remembering whom he expected, rose from his seat, saying—

“I know what it is. We must not let any one suspect what has just passed between us. Later, to-morrow, we will talk about it again. Now, you must dry your eyes, smile; it will be a difficult task. You shall see!”

“Some one is coming up stairs, approaching,” said Susan.

“Come, come,” interrupted the Marquis. And taking hold of the lamp, he passed into another room.

Irene and Susan followed him.

Just outside the door stood Anthony and Bernard.

Having found all the doors open, and guided by the light, they had reached Irene's apartment.

“Here is my surprise,” said the Marquis, concealing the past emotion under a fresh one.

The happiness caused by this unexpected return, made Susan and Irene forget everything else.

Bernard's astonishment at finding them up so early amounted almost to suspicion.

“ Why had they risen so soon? Day was just dawning.”

“ They had guessed my intentions and were waiting for you! Is that the way you greet us, Bernard? You have not kissed one of us.”

The Marquis added—

“ We all require rest, my dear boy. These ladies have been up part of the night; you have spent yours in the train. Supposing we all retired, to meet gaily at the breakfast table. Anthony, you will meet us there, will you not?”

“ Most willingly, sir.”

After shaking hands with the two young men, Susan and Irene retired to their rooms, as well as the Marquis.

When Bernard accompanied Anthony to the door, he said to him—

“ What is going on here? something wrong, I am sure?”

“ I will tell you all.”

So Bernard walked home with Anthony instead of going to bed.



CHAPTER XIX.

THE HONEYSUCKLE BOWER.

AT nine o'clock that morning Irene and Susan were in the garden.

Even that short rest had been sufficient to efface all traces of the fatigue of the preceding night. The happy tears they had shed had done them good. Irene's pale features were charming; she had never looked so handsome. Susan's happiness was more calm. Bernard soon joined them in a bower of honeysuckle under which they were sitting.

"Then you are not sorry, Bernard, at finding yourself once more in the Manor?" asked Irene.

"Say that I am delighted, enchanted. I could not think of sleeping. I was impatient to visit the happy scenes of my childhood;

the charming spots where, as a youth, I dreamt. The trees, the rocks, the smallest parts of the landscape are my old friends. Bespangled with dew, freshened by the morning breeze, I went to see them all, and they seemed to recognise and welcome me. Lost in my thoughts, listening to my heart, I fancied you were both walking with me, and more than once I caught myself saying, 'Do you remember, Susan?' 'Mdlle. Irene, have you not forgotten?'"

The governess, greatly moved, looked at him silently, and affectionately pressed his hand. The young girl's joy was more expressive, and she replied—

"These are kind words, Bernard, and they make us very happy. Believe me, in your long absence we do not forget you. 'What is he doing?' 'What picture is he painting now?' 'How are his hopes realised?' we are constantly saying. So now you are here with us, you must tell us of your success, and talk to us about Paris."

Some secret intention lurked in the smile

with which the artist answered, "That was my intention, and not without a cause."

"Pray, what may that cause be?"

"I will explain it presently. First, I must inform you that the exhibition will soon be opened, and that, amongst other things, I have a large picture there, on which Claude Guérin founds great hopes. The Directeur des Beaux Arts came to see it in my studio. There is some chance of its being bought for the Luxembourg. It would fetch a large sum."

"Besides fame," added Mdlle. Navailles.

"Last winter I earned a great deal of money. I made portraits, small pictures; so that I have saved a great deal. I am rich."

"Oh! rich!"

"Upon my honour I am. Chance seems to follow me everywhere. Why, even during the holidays that I am giving myself, I have already an order."

"How came that?" asked Susan.

"Last night, without noticing it, I had

entered a carriage on which was written the word "*réserve.*" There was only one traveller in it. At first he made a movement as if to show me my error, when suddenly he seemed to recognise me. One of the guards came to inform me of my error. My companion would not allow me to leave him. 'This gentleman is a friend of mine,' said he, 'I shall only be too happy to have him with me, if he will consent to stay.' I was very much astonished, for I had not recognised him. 'Are you not M. Bernard the painter?' he asked; 'I went a short time ago to your studio with an engineer, whose portrait you were taking. Pray, remain here with me.' He then offered me a cigar, and we began talking."

"And who is that gentleman?" asked Irene.

"A great man. An administrator, contractor, millionaire, and most amiable, I can assure you. He loves art and artists. Acquaintances are soon made in a train. Before we had travelled one hour together, we were

the best of friends in the world. His conversation is interesting, ingenuous, and original; he is a great observer, and immensely clever. He has travelled a great deal, seen much, and is acquainted with all the Parisian celebrities. He was so kind and cordial that at last I told him where I was coming to. 'So am I,' said he, 'this, indeed, is a piece of good news. I have not been very well for some time; the doctors have prescribed country air and rest. I was afraid I should have been alone, and not known what to do with myself. If you consent to take my likeness during your stay, I should never find a better opportunity. You will be doing me a service, and not have far to go out of your way. I am the proprietor of the Château de Navailles.' "

"That man!" exclaimed Susan, starting from her seat, and putting her hand on her heart.

"It is M. Maubray," answered Bernard.
"Do you know him, Susan?"

Irene also looked at her enquiringly.

“No! no! I felt a sudden pain in my heart; but it is nothing, it is over now. You know I am subject to them. Pray, go on Bernard.”

The pain, in fact, seemed over; she was still very pale, but calm and smiling. She took her seat once more, and insisted on hearing the end of Bernard's story.

“M. Maubray told me he had met you both when he paid a visit to the Marquis. You, no doubt, are aware of the motive of his visit. He related the whole of the affair to me, with a frankness which does him great honour.”

“I remember,” answered Irene, “Maubray de Navailles. When he left grandpapa we met him as we were returning to the Manor. He looked at us a great deal, did he not, Susan?”

“I believe so,” she answered with indifference.

“You made a deeper impression on him,” said Bernard. “He spoke much about the Marquis's genial kindness, and about the

beauty of Mdlle. de Navailles, and Susan was not forgotten, I assure you."

"Indeed," replied the latter, with some sort of bitterness, "then you conversed during the whole journey?"

"What else could we do in a train? But I hope to see him at the Château. Guess how much he is going to give me for his portrait? Three thousand francs! You see, Mdlle. Irene, I shall soon be covered with gold."

He had taken both her hands in his, and looked at her steadfastly.

"What is it you want to say to me?" she asked rather anxiously.

"You have guessed, then. I do not make this display of my riches without a motive. You are right, I have one; but I hesitate to own it. I dare not, and yet I must. It is my duty—my right!"

"Speak, Bernard," said Irene, subdued by the influence of the emotion which made the artist's voice tremble.

"First let me beg of you not to be offended at what I am going to say! I expect, im-

plore from you an immense proof of esteem and friendship. Your answer will fill me with joy, or afflict me cruelly. Do not forget that. Be generous and confiding towards one who has devoted his life to you !” His voice becoming graver as he spoke, showed so much sincerity, such an ardent wish of being favourably heard, that the young girl, moved by it, but already fearing she understood him, could only make a sign for him to continue—

“The last time I came to the Manor, a strange suspicion crossed my mind ; it was confirmed this morning on my arrival. I have enquired of Anthony—”

“Anthony ! what could he tell you ?”

“He often passes here before day-break, he has seen lights at a certain window. Agathe’s mysterious relations with the lace-merchant in town, astonished and disquieted him. He questioned that man, learnt everything, and—I know all.”

“Oh ! I understand !” said Irene, hiding her face with her hands.

“Yes,” continued Bernard, now decided to speak; “yes, I know of your labour, your poverty. Do not blush for it! It had honoured your grandfather, it makes you more noble, more saintly, in my eyes! But I must put a term to it, and—”

“Bernard!” she exclaimed, “it is I who now entreat of you not to continue.”

She had risen, endeavouring to fly from him.

But he placed himself before her, and with a generous inspiration, continued—

“Why do you wish me to be silent! Do I not belong to this family? Am I not the Marquis’s adopted son, almost your brother? My education, my talents, I owe them to his generosity! My money is his! Do not refuse it! he will never know it. You have admitted Susan to share your secret, your devotedness. It is now my turn! I cannot and will not take a denial. You are proud, but I have my pride also. I respect and admire you—do not disdain me! Irene, do not treat me as a stranger, an inferior, from whom one

may not receive anything. Take it as a loan! You cannot imagine how happy you will make me. Do you wish to humble me—drive me to despair—or to break my heart?”

Bernard, offering and supplicating by turns, was irresistible. He was now kneeling to Irene.

Her eyes were filled with tears, she trembled, being too agitated to be able to speak; her features, her gestures expressed that she could not and would not accept.

“Bernard, my friend,” she said at last. “I am as distressed as you are. I shall never forget this hour. I wish my heart was worthy of yours. But no! no, I cannot—I must not accept. Besides, Susan will tell you as I do, we no longer require it, our trouble is over. I am proud, very proud of your generous feelings! Humble you, despise you! Could you but read in my heart, you would see how I appreciate the nobleness of your sentiments, how much I love you!”

Just then, at the other extremity of the garden, the Marquis was heard calling Irene.

“Grandfather—pray do not let him suspect—”

Bending over Bernard as he rose, she imprinted a kiss on his forehead.

“Your sister! oh, yes, indeed I am your sister.”

And taking advantage of Bernard's emotion, she fled.

He remained motionless, entranced. Did not that chaste embrace repay him a thousand fold the sorrow of her refusal?

“You must not be angry with her, she is a Navailles,” said Susan, who had remained a silent witness to the preceding scene.

“I,” said Bernard, forgetting himself also, “I adore her! and not to be able to do anything for her. I will apply to the Marquis himself.”

“No,” answered Susan, endeavouring to calm his agitation, “you will not do that, Bernard.”

“Why not?”

“Because you are only indebted to the Marquis for his affection.”

“But the money he spent to bring me up, to educate me? The allowance he wished to continue to me?”

“He did not pay it.”

“Who did then?”

“That you shall know some day.” And leaning on the astounded young man's arm, she went with him to join the Marquis of Navailles.





CHAPTER XX.

THE HEATH.

ANTHONY, who had been invited to breakfast by the Marquis, had now joined the party in the breakfast-room.

They had been congratulating him on the great success he had obtained in his farming business.

“My lord,” said he, “I wish to make a proposal to you.”

“Come, let us hear it.”

“Is the large plat of heath adjoining the estate still yours? But it produces you nothing? You have no use for it?”

“What would you have me make of it?”

“Arable land:”

“Impossible!”

“If you will consent to let it to me, I will try.”

“Nonsense. Your labour would be lost, my boy. It is barren land, and filled with stones.”

“On the surface I dare say it is; but beneath that it is probably better. Allow me to turn over two or three furrows, and judge for myself. I have a plough at a short distance. M. Maubray is to be there at two o'clock.”

“He is returned, then?”

“We came by the same train,” answered Bernard.

“This morning I made my project known to him. He thinks the best plan would be for him to find the machinery, you the land, and I the labour, and then share the harvest. If you prefer that system, I warrant it will greatly increase your income. After breakfast, if you like to come and see it, we will make an essay.”

“Yes,” replied the old gentleman, “it will be a walk. Besides, I owe M. Maubray a visit. We will all go together, shall we not, *children?*”

Susan alone refused to accompany them.

“Allow me to remain at home, I am not very well.”

When they left the breakfast table, Bernard pressed Anthony's hand.

“Yours is a kind act,” said he, “thank you for it.”

“I deserve no thanks, for I shall be a gainer by it. A partnership, that is all. Believe me, Bernard, whether they be marquises or beggars, if they have waste land, or unoccupied arms, the best way to help people is to till the first and employ the latter. Labour, constant labour. No disparagement to your brushes, but I proclaim agriculture the first of all.”

An hour later they set out for their walk.

The Marquis and Anthony, talking of their project, walked in front. A few paces behind them came Irene and Bernard.

No allusion was made to what had passed in the morning. The secret was enclosed in their hearts. A new affection had sprung up between them, for which words would have been

useless ; they understood one another. Happy and confiding, she leant on his arm. He never had been more attentive, more tender, more respectful. What a delightful walk it was to them on this fine May morning, under the eye of God, and surrounded by all the things which recalled so many sweet remembrances. The most precious of all to them was the one they spoke the least of.

Now and then Anthony's voice was heard endeavouring to convert the Marquis over to his opinions ; then a peal of laughter, mocking Anthony's hopes.

"You are like Guzman, Anthony, and admit of no obstacles."

"But the heath extends beyond twenty acres, sir."

"Twenty acres of briars and brambles ! You will disturb my rabbits."

"You have left off shooting ?"

"Unfortunately !"

"It is better to have corn in your granaries, and money in your chest. Will not the poor of the country find their benefit in it ?"

“I should be very happy if such was the case; but I am sadly afraid they will be crowns and corn in the air.”

They had now reached the heath. Anthony beckoned to his labourers, who came to him, led by Mathias.

Therese's husband was riding one of the horses which dragged the plough. Baptiste and James followed him, carrying spades and shovels on their shoulders.

They began by making a trench.

Irene and Bernard walked about gathering heath.

The Marquis, seated on the edge of a ditch, knocked the stones about with his cane.

Anthony assisted the labourers.

A horseman was seen approaching.

It was M. Maubray.

He dismounted and walked towards the Marquis, who rose from his seat.

“I must beg you will consider this meeting as a visit, sir. I have promised myself never to enter the Château. You will always be most welcome at the Manor.”

Maubray bowed. Bernard had now come forward to shake hands with him. After saluting Irene, he seemed to look for some one else.

Anthony ordered the plough to be brought to the trench. Mathias drove the horses.

The soil was broken with the greatest difficulty. At last, under a deep layer of stones, the mould appeared.

“You see I was right,” said Anthony to the Marquis.

“Agreed; but look, the horses have stopped, spent by this first trial.

“But the engine will neither stop nor tire.”

“I have something better to propose,” said M. Maubray, who had been examining the furrow. “I am in great want of ballast for the branch road I am having constructed in the valley. I will have rails established on the slope, and in less than two months my waggons will have carried away all the stones lying on the surface, if the Marquis consents to sell them to me.”

“Are stones sold, then?”

“Pretty dear when they can be found at such a short distance, and with so little expense. It is a good opportunity for me.”

“As well as for me,” said the old gentleman. “But how are these things settled?”

“There are tariffs. The prices are fixed.”

“Just as for horses, then?” answered the Marquis, hastening to accept the lucky chance.

“This is the first harvest,” observed Anthony. “As to the others, they concern me. Is the bargain concluded, sir?”

“Willingly!” replied he, delighted at the thought of this first money which came in so conveniently. I leave the details to you, Anthony; you must be my lieutenant.”

“Accepted,” answered the contractor.

Turning to Bernard, he said—

“When is the first sitting for my portrait to be?”

“To-morrow, if you are at liberty.”

“I shall expect you to-morrow.”

A little after the Marquis went away with

his children. He no longer endeavoured to conceal his joy.

“Of course, the star of Navailles is not rising yet; but this is perhaps its first ray, and announces its return.”

“Poor grandfather! he always has had the belief that he will become rich again some day.”

“God forbid!” exclaimed Bernard. “I should be in despair.”

“Why so?” asked Irene in a low voice.

He did not answer her question.

She blushed.

* * * * *

After their departure Maubray asked Anthony whether the governess had left the Manor.

“No; but she did not wish to walk out.”

“Ah!” Then, after a while, he added—

“What a charming young man Bernard is. Talented as he is, he must make his way.”

“He will become a great artist,” Anthony answered. “And is so handsome, so brave,

so good! A true genius—the best of men.”

“You seem to be very fond of him.”

“Like all those who know him. He was a schoolfellow of mine; we were almost brought up together.”

“Indeed! I should like to know all about that. Could not one of your men lead my horse to the farm? We might walk back there together.”

Mathias took charge of the horse.

Anthony, who was never so happy as when he talked of Bernard, related his infancy, his vocation, his first success.

“Just as I thought,” said the contractor. “He has already told me many things about himself, during our journey here last night, with such frankness and good nature that he has inspired me with the greatest interest. His parents must be very proud of him.”

“His parents! The poor young man has none. He does not know his family; he is a foundling.”

“Do you know how the Marquis became acquainted with him?”

“In a very simple manner. M. de Navailles was then still living in Paris. One night, very late, returning home in his carriage, his coachman saw something lying on a stone bench, near the gates of the hotel. It was a baby—Bernard. The Marquis had the child brought in, put it out to nurse, and then sent it to school. No one knew anything about it here. It was only after his retreat to the Manor that the Marquis caused his *protégé* to be sent to him. Ever since he has treated him like a son.”

“How old is he?” asked Maubray, a few steps farther.

“About the same age as myself; three and twenty.”

Maubray remained pensive a few moments, then he asked a fresh question.

“Bernard seems to possess a profound gratitude for the Marquis, his daughter, and for Mdlle. Susan Aubert.”

“Nothing can be more natural. Susan has

so much friendship for him. Alone in the world, she has become attached to Bernard. He is her favourite. I even remember a circumstance in which her affection for him astonished us all."

"What was that circumstance?"

"A fire broke out in the village. At the sound of the alarm bell, we ran to it, like everybody else. Cries were heard in a cottage in flames; a child was there in danger of death. Bernard rushed in the midst of the flames, and saved it. When he returned, Susan seized hold of him, pressed him to her heart, and fainted. A mother could not have been more moved."

"Ah!" murmured Maubray, "a mother."

And as they got to the farm, he suddenly changed the subject of the conversation.





CHAPTER XXI.

THE RENDEZVOUS.

A MONTH passed away without any remarkable incident.

Now and then Bernard went to the Château to work at M. Maubray's portrait.

Long conversations generally followed the sitting. A cordial intimacy had grown between them.

On the heath, the labour was going on with the greatest possible speed. Numerous workmen were encamped there. Rails had been laid, and the waggons were constantly in motion. The stony surface had entirely disappeared. Maubray himself brought the money; the sum was more than sufficient to balance the finances at the Manor.

Irene herself had said so. The Marquis

was overjoyed. He asked M. Maubray to stay to dinner.

When the dinner bell rung, Irene came down alone.

"Susan has a violent headache," she said. "Her dinner is to be taken up into her room."

No one remarked the cloud which passed over Maubray's brow. It was the third time he had called on the Marquis, and either by chance or premeditation on the part of the governess, he had never met her.

"Allow me to go up to her," said Bernard. "Perhaps I may be able to persuade her to come down."

He returned alone.

"Susan is really very poorly," said he, "and begs you will excuse her, sir."

"That was done without her request. We all know that Susan is not fanciful, but she is really beginning to make me anxious. For the last few weeks she has not been herself. She has always been strong; Bernard's return ought to have made her happy, and yet she is sad, languid, and seeks solitude.

She constantly refuses to accompany us in our walks. I am fearful lest this should be the beginning of some serious indisposition. I must send for the doctor. Pardon me, M. Maubray, this is not interesting to you. Pray take Mdlle. de Navailles in to dinner."

Susan's indisposition seemed to have thrown a certain degree of reserve on the party, but the old gentleman's fund of humour soon put them all at ease.

He questioned the contractor on his travels, his enterprises, the railroad which was soon to cross the country.

Maubray praised the benefits of modern industry, and defended the great cause of progress against his host with as much conviction as tact. His conversation was witty, his repartees clever, and more than once elicited Irene's smiling approbation.

Bernard supported him.

At dessert the Marquis declared himself shaken in his convictions, if not vanquished.

"I am the representative of the past," said

he, "and you, gentlemen, the pioneers of the future."

After dinner they took a walk in the garden. Maubray, having remained alone with the Marquis, said to him, pointing to Irene and Bernard, who were walking a few steps in front of them—

"I envy you, sir. You have an adopted son, who loves you as if he were your own; a most charming daughter—and that is true happiness!"

"Have you no children, then?"

"No!" he answered, with regret; "I was never married."

"But you are rich!"

"A stronger reason for feeling one's own loneliness. Old age, so sweet to you, is my greatest dread; nothing can stand in lieu of domestic happiness—it is worth more than millions."

When Maubray left in the evening he had not recovered his composure.

* * * * *

The next day, as he was going down a lane which joined on to the high road, he perceived the carriage of the Marquis. A high hedge rose at the angle of the two roads, behind which M. Maubray hid himself, observing without being seen.

The Marquis was, no doubt, going to M. Morisseau's. Irene and Bernard were with him.

"Susan is alone!" said he.

As soon as the carriage had got to some distance, he went at once to the Manor.

Ambroise opened the door.

Maubray asked for the Marquis, and seemed disappointed at not finding him.

"It was a parting visit; I start to-morrow. Is there no one to whom I could speak?"

"Mdlle. Aubert is at home," answered the old servant.

"Ask her if she will receive me."

Ambroise showed him into the drawing-room. Maubray stood listening. Great anxiety could be read on his features. A

footstep was heard approaching—the door opened—it was Susan.

When Ambroise delivered his message her first thoughts had been to refuse seeing M. Maubray. Then, all at once, she changed her mind; like a person decided to put an end to some great sorrow, some peril.

She was pale and oppressed, but calm and dignified.

Maubray appeared much more agitated than she did.

They looked at one another in silence. Who should be the first to break it? It was her. He held both his hands out to her, calling her tenderly by her name.

She drew back, and coldly said—

“What have you come here for? And what do you want with me?”

“Susan, I have deserved your disdain, your hatred. Have a little mercy! Listen to me.”

“I will do so, now I have come.”

Then, with great gentleness, she added—

“My heart bears no resentment against

you. I had forgiven, forgotten. Do as I have done. Your presence here troubles and disquiets me. Of late I have suffered fearfully! If any one in this house ceased to esteem me, I would not remain in it. Let us avoid one another. I ask this of your generosity, your honour!"

He had bent his head down; but, raising it at this appeal—

"I will go," said he; "you shall not see me again, do not fear. I wished but to ask one question of you."

By her look she authorised him to do so.

"Susan, there are chances in which one must recognise the hand of God. It was God who brought Bernard in my path. God alone could put in my heart that surmise, that anguish you can read in my eyes. I entreat of you to tell me who that young man is."

"You have divined it, then!"

And trembling, agitated, she was forced to lean on her chair for support.

"Yes, I have!" he replied, deeply moved. "The sentiment which attaches me to him,

the affection you bear him, the cry just escaped from your heart. Ah! I was quite certain I was not mistaken!"

"Silence!" exclaimed Susan, looking around her with fear.

Endeavouring to tranquilise her, he begged she would explain all to him.

"Not in this house," she tremblingly answered. "The Marquis alone knows part of the truth. I had promised him to remain silent. I had sufficient courage to do so. And later when he freed me from my promise in favour of Bernard, when Bernard became a man, I did not dare. I would not blush before him."

"What! even he is ignorant?"

"He has not the least suspicion; but it is time to speak. I must—in your presence—he shall be our judge!"

Transported with gratitude and happiness, Maubray exclaimed—"Oh! Susan, I never even could have allowed myself to hope for that—"

She did not let him continue.

“ You have not understood me, I have the right to impose my conditions. Listen to them.”

“ What are they ? ”

“ He must only see in you an ambassador from his father. And if he does not allow you to name him, you must remain silent. That is the promise I expect from you. Have I your word for it ? ”

“ Upon my honour ! ”

“ I will go to-morrow with him to your house. Not a word more to-day. I am completely worn out—pray leave me now.”

Overcome by her emotion she dropped in a chair.

Maubray left her to herself.

* * * * *

That same evening Susan said to Bernard—
“ I should like to see the portrait you are making.”

“ M. Maubray's ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Nothing is easier. It is very well done,

I believe. Supposing we all went to the Château together?"

"No, the Marquis has sworn never to return there. As to Irene, it would not be proper. My hair is grey, I am an old woman. We will both go there together secretly. Do not speak to any one about it."

The next morning when they arrived, Mau-bray was waiting for them.





CHAPTER XXII.

THE REVELATION.

At first Bernard did not notice Susan's and Maubray's emotion.

After bowing respectfully to her, Maubray led them into the saloon in which the portrait was placed. Susan admired it. Few words were exchanged between them.

Suddenly the governess, turning towards the contractor, said—

“Are we alone?”

“Yes, no one can overhear us.”

To be better convinced of this fact, he looked out in the ante-chamber, and then bolted both doors.

Bernard looked at Susan with bewilderment.

“This visit,” said she, “was only a pretence; we have a very serious subject to discuss, Bernard, and which is of great im-

portance to your future welfare. A few days ago I promised to tell you who had paid for your education. You shall now be made acquainted with everything."

"In M. Maubray's presence?" he enquired, still more astonished.

"In his presence. He knows the secret of your birth—he is your father's friend and representative, a mere accident has told him where you were, and he wishes to know whether he may reveal himself to you?"

After remaining silent a few moments, Bernard exclaimed—

"My father! my father exists?"

"Yes," answered Maubray.

"Your mother also!" Susan hastened to add; "you shall soon know all about her."

Maubray led her to a seat, where for a few moments she remained lost in thought.

The contractor placed himself with his back to the window, so that his features might remain in the shade. He was afraid not to be able to hide his anguish; he was paler than Susan.

Bernard only noticed her; impatient to hear her narrative, he could not help saying—

“Speak! oh, pray do speak! Can you not see how anxious I am?”

“Your mother,” she slowly said, “was a poor officer’s daughter, he became a widower when she was still a child. She was educated at Saint Denis.”

“Like you,” remarked Bernard.

“Like myself—and with me. She was one of my companions, of my friends. Home seemed lonely to her when she returned there at eighteen. No mother! no relations! none of those affections so precious to youth, and which become its safeguard. Her father had contracted habits he did not give up. He left her alone, constantly alone. It was he who introduced into his house the man who was to ruin his daughter. Far be it from her to think of reproaching him! She honours and cherishes his memory—besides nothing excuses such a fault. Only this must be said in her favour, no one had warned her of the danger, nothing preserved her from it. She

believed in the promises of a man who pretended to love her, who had sworn to become her husband. She fell. Her seducer forsook her, disappeared, on learning she would soon become a mother. M. Maubray, who was his confidant, will confirm my assertion."

"It is true!" said he.

"Infamous!" exclaimed Bernard.

Maubray was rising to protest. With a look, Susan reminded him of his promise. He resumed his seat, bending his looks towards the ground.

The governess continued—

"What was to become of the poor girl? she had just made up her mind to confess everything to her father, when he fell ill and died. She also determined to die. Everything was prepared for committing that dreadful deed, when Providence sent her an unexpected protector, the Marquis of Navailles."

"Ah!" said Bernard, "the Marquis!"

"He had come to offer his services to the poor orphan—he guessed all, and made her

understand it was her duty to live for her child. You were born, Bernard, without any one suspecting your birth. One night you were carried before the hotel of the man who had promised to adopt you. He pretended to find you there by chance, and not to know anything about you. Thus was your mother's honour saved."

"Had she also forsaken me?"

"No, for at the cost of her happiness she devoted herself to you. The Marquis convinced her that if her fault were known, every door would be shut against her, and she would find no employment. Desirous of working for you, she began by giving lessons. This first money earned she took it to your nurse, she saw you, and kissed you. Later when you were old enough to recognise her, she ceased showing herself. But she never forsook you one instant. Invisible for her son, she followed and watched over him everywhere. A good situation was offered her. With her savings your education would be ensured. But it was abroad, very far! she

could not make up her mind to accept, she would not be separated from her child !”

“The Marquis decided her to do so by giving her a new hope. ‘I have just become a grandfather,’ said he; ‘continue to deserve my esteem, and I promise you you shall be her governess, and have Bernard near you.’”

Bernard started up.

“Susan, dear Susan !” he exclaimed, “but that history is yours.”

“Wait, wait,” she said. “Your mother accepted. Those were sad years for her. She was far from you, but the Marquis often wrote to her. At last his promise was realised ; you came to the Manor. And now, Bernard, remember, remember !”

But Bernard was already pressing her in his arms.

“Mother, my mother !” he exclaimed. “Then my heart did not deceive me. I loved you as much as if I had been your child ; but I shall love you a great deal more now. I understand everything now, your sacrifice, your kindness. The money the

Marquis gave me was yours. The tenderness you showed me was that of a mother ; and I did not know it ! Every one shall now, and see how proud I am of you."

She tore herself from his embrace and said—

"No, child, that must not be ! It would prove disregard for the Marquis's kindness. If he has freed me from my oath in your favour, if he has thought me worthy of that reward, it is on condition the secret should remain between us. Think of the world's opinion. Think of Irene ; she must not know anything."

On hearing Irene's name Bernard started, but was resigned.

"I will be as courageous as you have been, dearest mother. I will be silent for her sake."

"That is right, my son."

Then, addressing Maubray, she added—

"Let me request that promise from you, also. The confession you wished to be present at had its conditions. I sincerely hope the person who sent you will keep them, and that you, sir, will promise in his name."

They were silent a few moments ; then Maubray drew nearer to them.

The emotion and anxiety seen on his features might be attributed to the sympathy Bernard inspired him with, the friendship he owned for his father.

“ I promise silence in his name and in mine. He is now an honourable man, incapable of breaking his oath.”

“ I hope so, sir.”

Maubray now turned to Bernard, and with a trembling voice said—

“ What answer must I give your father ?”

Susan silenced her son as he was going to speak.

“ Wait, and reflect. I must not forget my promise, either.”

“ What promise, mother ?”

“ I promised you should decide.”

Bernard hesitated for an instant.

This seemed like hope to Maubray.

“ Your father would be happy to receive you in his arms. He is rich.”

Those words revolted Bernard's pride.

“I do not and will not know him. That man, loved by such a woman as you, mother, could deceive and desert her! He had a son, and it is only at the end of twenty-three years that he remembers it.”

“Bernard! do not be without pity! He was guilty, more than guilty; he deserves to expiate his crime. But, believe me, when I take your answer to him he will suffer cruelly. Allow me at least to let him hope that some day—”

But Bernard was deaf to all entreaties; heard no other voice but Susan's, saw no one but her.

“Never! Since you are to see him, sir, tell him that all I expect from him, all I ask of him, is to respect my mother's honour! I have condemned myself to silence; the least he can do is to imitate me.”

“'Tis well,” said Maubray. “I will teach him his duty; he will understand it. You shall never hear his name spoken. You shall never know him. Your mother is truly revenged.”

Susan, pitying his grief, then said—

“Child, that is not a reason why you should be angry with M. Maubray. He has been kind to you, and we must be grateful to him for the manner in which he has fulfilled his mission. You must not part from him in enmity. Do you not see he is holding his hand out to you?”

A spark of happiness lit up Maubray's features; he pressed Bernard's hand in his, and when the young artist said—

“Adieu.”

“No, not adieu. Let me hope I shall soon see you again.”





CHAPTER XXIII.

THE CHRISTENING.

SUSAN and Bernard returned slowly home. The present hour was to them one of those delightful moments which are never forgotten in after life.

The happy mother leant proudly on her son's arm. He could not take his eyes off her.

Now and then they smiled, or pressed each other's hand.

No words could express their happiness.

When they got to that part of the wood where no one could see them, Bernard fondly kissed his mother, and pressed her to his heart. Then they continued their walk.

"We must be calm now," said she, on approaching the Manor. "No one must guess the new tie existing between us."

“None but the Marquis. I will convince him of my discretion; tell him all my gratitude.”

When the carriage returned a few hours later, Irene went up into her room. The Marquis was alone in the drawing-room, when Susan and Bernard entered it. He no sooner saw them than he guessed what had occurred.

“Susan has spoken,” said he, with a smile.

Bernard approached him respectfully.

“May God bless and reward you for all your kindness to us, my benefactor, my more than father. How can I ever show my gratitude, and prove myself worthy of all you have done for us?”

“By continuing as you have begun,” replied the Marquis. “You owe me nothing, child. God himself has paid your debt. He always rewards a kind act. Has not Susan been a mother to Irene? Are you not our pride, our joy? Be courageous, and hope.”

Irene's voice was heard outside; she was coming to join them.

“ Silence now ! ” continued the old gentleman, putting one of his fingers on his lips.

The mother and son silently made the promise.

“ What is the matter with you all ? ” asked Irene.

“ We are happy, and that makes us gay, ” answered the Marquis.

Maubray did not return to the Manor.

Susan excused him by relating that in his last visit he had stated that urgent business forced him to leave Navailles at once.

In the beginning of July a letter came from Claude Guérin recalling Bernard to Paris. This letter brought very good news. After the Exhibition he was to be *décoré* with the cross of the *Légion d'Honneur*.

“ Now you are a knight, Bernard, and my old title bows to your new one, so bravely won. Labour also, you see, grants nobility. ”

Susan and Bernard were greatly grieved at this new separation ; yet his last look was for Irene.

* * * * *

Anthony also had his share of success.

The money produced by his colewort was sufficient to pay the rent of his farm and lands; his father could scarcely believe his own senses.

“You see now, M. Froment, Anthony was right. Why will you not own it?” said M. Morisseau. “Why not grant him the only reward he wishes for, the assurance of your satisfaction?”

“We must see yet,” answered the obstinate peasant.

When the corn was ripe, such a harvest had never been seen; the meadows, the cattle, the farm! all equally deserved admiration, and were set up as models.

At the Agricultural Comitia he was presented with the cup of honour.

Even the Préfect and the Bishop complimented and encouraged him. All the newspapers in the Department praised him. He was cited as the pattern and benefactor of the country. He was the equal of the richest burghers, even of notaries.

“Who could ever have believed such a

thing?" said M. Froment. "I am quite astounded. I can scarcely believe my own eyes."

Dame Certainly laughed at him without mercy.

Even M. Durand, the first notary in the country, came to visit the farm.

He congratulated the farmer for having refused a desk in his office.

These compliments revived old Froment's favourite idea. The same evening he took his son apart, and the following conversation ensued—

"I say, my boy! the marriage might come uppermost again."

"What marriage?"

"The one with Mdlle. Durand. A fine girl!"

"No, father."

"Do you intend remaining a bachelor?"

"Not the least in the world."

"Then where will you find a better match?"

"I will tell you that—when your pardon is complete—when we frankly agree."

"You have some one in view, then?"

"Yes."

"She has a large dower, has she not?"

"It is not the dower I think about."

"What then?"

"The wife."

"But you are making money; and I have some."

"The very reason why I need not ask for any from the father of the person I love. If I work, it is to conquer the right of marrying for love."

"And—my consent!"

"You will not refuse it, father."

"Speak then; tell me who it is."

"Do you give me back my promise?"

"What promise?"

"You know; the two years' trial, after which I have promised you, if I did not succeed, to give up agriculture. One of them is now passed."

The old man made wry faces, and passed his hand over his head.

"One good harvest proves nothing," he

said at last; "and I cannot yet declare myself to be convinced. We shall see next spring. Perhaps then I may grant you six months, but not more."

"Very well; then we will continue this conversation in April."

"What a mysterious fellow you are."

"I should be happy to speak, father; that depends upon you. I am waiting."

"No; not yet!"

Then, notwithstanding the old countryman's cunning, Anthony, who was quite as obstinate as his father, kept his secret.

* * * * *

Towards the end of October there was a grand *fête* at the farm. M^{de}. Mathias had presented her husband with twins.

"Sweet Jesus!" exclaimed Dame Certainly; "but we shall require two godfathers and two godmothers."

"That is my business," replied Anthony. "Everybody esteems Therese, and I have formed a plan. You shall see."

A few days after the young mother was sitting at the door, enjoying the warmth of an autumnal sun, and nursing one of her babies.

Dame Certainly was rocking the other.

Mathias, leaning on the window-sill, was fondly admiring them, when Anthony entered the farm.

“I have found the two godfathers and godmothers,” said he, “if M. and Mdme. Mathias approve of them.”

“Whatever you do is sure to be well done, Master,” said Therese.

“At all events I should like to know if they are very grand people,” enquired the dame.

“The least of them is myself.”

Therese held out her hand to him, with a grateful look.

“Good, my boy! Who is the godmother?”

“Mdle. Morisseau! I have her promise and her father’s. Are you satisfied?”

“Certainly! Who is the other godmother?”

“Mdlle. de Navailles; and Bernard is godfather. He comes from Paris on purpose.”

Mathias could not sufficiently thank him.

“This, sir, is too great an honour.”

“Has not Therese given the country the greatest example of probity? You are at the head of those who assist me; almost my lieutenant. The two babies belong to the family; they shall be baptised like princes.”

On the day fixed for the ceremony, people came to it from all the surrounding villages. Therese had insisted on carrying the children to church herself.

Bernard walked with Irene; Agathe with Anthony. Next came the Marquis and M. Morisseau; Dame Certainly and old Froment. This time Claude Guérin accompanied his pupil.

A baptism is generally a very imposing ceremony; that one was to be a memorable event in the village. All the parish was there, from the ancient lord of the manor to the poorest peasant—all the authorities. The

church bells pealed merrily. Every one commented on the history of Therese and Mathias; the young people who had joined in promising to protect the twins through life were admired. They themselves felt the purest emotion.

On their return to the farm, and whilst they were still under the influence of this soft impression, Anthony spoke to Agathe in tones which she alone could hear, and which went to her heart.

“To-day is the first time we have been in a church together,” said he, “there to join our hands. We were in the sight of God, and He did not turn it from us. It is in His presence, Agathe, I now dare to ask you—have you guessed that I love you?”

“I think that—I have!” she answered softly. “Therese told me that could be read in people’s eyes. Often—already—just now even—it has seemed to me that your eyes told me so.”

“You must believe them, Agathe, and answer me—if in a few months, when I am

certain of the future, I went and asked your father to give you to me as a wife—do you think he would consent ?”

“ He esteems you, Anthony.”

“ And you, Agathe ?”

“ Speak to my father. I will obey him.”

Agathe never was more joyous, nor prettier than on that day.

They all danced till evening.

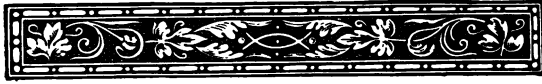
* * * * *

The winter passed with its usual labours and pleasures.

At the Manor competence has returned. In the farm house and at the magistrate's, hope was a constant guest.

What was Bernard doing in Paris all this time ?





CHAPTER XXIV.

A DUEL.

CLAUDE GUÉRIN and Bernard had their apartments, their studios in the same house.

One morning, whilst the young artist was at work, the servant announced to him that a stranger wished to see him.

It was M. Maubray.

At first Bernard felt surprised and embarrassed, whilst the contractor was calm and smiling.

“Am I no longer your friend?” said he. “Let us both forget what passed at—. I have transmitted your answer to the person spoken of then. He lives abroad—in America. He is gone, and will not return here for many years.”

Then changing the conversation, he continued—

“You have forgotten my portrait, which

you have not finished. I have had it sent me. Shall I have it brought here? I came to know what day and hour would suit you best."

The artist tried to excuse himself.

"I wish to have it," said the visitor, "such a painting begun is almost an engagement. Your refusal would disoblige me. I do not think I have deserved it."

"I am quite at your service," answered Bernard, moved by a sympathy which he felt almost against his own will.

They made an agreement about the new sittings.

Before leaving, Maubray went and looked at the sketches which hung against the wall, the large painting at which the artist was working.

"Bravo!" said he, "I am glad of these proofs of your wish to improve. This is good—very good! Your talent develops itself, it increases. This painting will be quite a masterpiece!"

The door of the studio opened suddenly, giving entrance to Claude Guérin.

He appeared to be quite in a tremor. He had already begun speaking, when the sight of a stranger stopped him. Bernard introduced them to one another.

“ M. Maubray, of whom I have often spoken to you—Claude Guérin, my friend and professor.”

An incomprehensible satisfaction had lighted up the artist's features. After hesitating one instant, he said—

“ I remember ; this is the gentleman who has shown you so much friendship. He is a man of the world, and I am happy to meet him here. Pray remain, sir. Perhaps you will kindly assist us with your advice.”

The contractor bowed.

“ On what subject ? ” asked Bernard.

“ It seems, my dear boy, that you have had a quarrel.”

“ How came you to know it ? ” asked the young man, sorry to find his secret known to his old friend.

“ From the friends of your adversary. They had come to the wrong studio. Not

wishing you to be disturbed, I said you were absent. By their stiffness I guessed the motive of their visit, and made them tell me all. It is a challenge—a duel!”

“A duel!” Maubray repeated, endeavouring to hide his emotion.

Bernard hesitated to answer.

“I wish for an explanation before this gentleman,” said Claude. “We have no time to lose. I left them in my apartment, where they are awaiting my return. Pray, Bernard, speak.”

“You will not, I hope, refuse me the confidence shown me by M. Guérin. Besides, from what I see it is urgent that you should frankly tell us the truth.”

“Yes,” confessed Bernard, “but the worst of all is that I was wrong.”

“How so?” asked both his friends.

“Yesterday evening, at a party, some young men were speaking of Alexandre Dumas' new comedy—‘The Natural Son.’ All those poor nameless children were treated

very cavalierly; their mother's still more so. I took their part."

"Ah! so that was the cause!" said Maubray.

"The family to which one of my contradictors belongs bears a bad name. Hurt by one of his answers, I flew in a passion, and said it was better not to know one's relations than to blush for them. He rushed towards me; when, stopped by the others, he left the room, saying, 'You shall hear from me tomorrow.' His friends are come to demand justice for this insult."

"Just what I feared!" said Guérin sadly.

Maubray, on the contrary, appeared stimulated by the danger.

"Bernard, who is the young man you have insulted?"

"An honest man! I esteem and love him."

"What do these gentlemen demand?" asked the contractor of Claude.

"A duel—or an apology."

"An apology! never!" exclaimed Bernard.

"That is right," said Maubray.

“They wish you, Bernard, to name the two friends you have chosen to regulate the conditions of the meeting.”

“Two friends; here we are! Bernard, do you accept Claude Guérin and I as the guardians of your honour?”

“Most willingly.”

The old artist seized Maubray's hand. With such a companion he felt stronger. Bernard remained alone.

Ten minutes later his friends returned; Bernard looked at them enquiringly.

“It is to take place to-morrow morning in the Bois de Vincennes,” said Maubray. “It was their right to choose the weapons; they prefer swords. Can you fence?”

“Very little.”

Claude Guérin was in despair.

Maubray apparently unmoved.

“Allow me to see what you can do,” said he, taking two foils which hung on the wall.

“Willingly.”

They placed themselves in position. In a very short time, Bernard had been touched

thrice; his foil had not even approached M. Maubray's chest.

“Your fencing has indeed been neglected,” said the latter, in an altered tone of voice, “but your hand is quick and your wrist strong. Let me see, I think I remember a Spanish feint, which has often been useful to me in cases such as these. You may be touched, but you are certain of disarming your adversary. Put yourself on defence, and examine what I am going to do. One, two, parry quart. I will uncover myself—attention!”

• “Ah!” exclaimed Bernard, “I have touched you.”

But Maubray, binding the sword which had touched him, sent it rolling several steps from him.

“Yes; but see! Let us begin again.”

He disarmed Bernard a second time.

“I understand now.”

“Begin, then,” said Maubray, falling on his guard.

He was truly handsome thus; his features were calm, his eyes sparkled and he smiled.

At first, Bernard did not succeed. "Bravo!" said Maubray, at the third trial. He renewed the essay, and the lesson lasted nearly an hour.

"This is quite enough," said Maubray. "I acknowledge myself defeated. You, my young friend, are indefatigable. You have an iron wrist, most proper for this feint. You will vanquish; but to make your victory more certain, I will return this evening, when we will continue fencing."

"Thank you," said Bernard; "*au revoir*." He retired, accompanied by Claude Guérin.

"It is running a great risk," said the old artist.

"Do not distress yourself! I have confidence in him—he is truly brave!"

* * * * *

The next morning the two adversaries met in a glade of the wood.

Maubray seemed to say—

"Remember!"

He was determined not to forget. His face was pale, but his look was bold and firm.

Ardently wishing to put an end to the *rencontre*, he seized the first opportunity of disarming his adversary ; but he was wounded in the shoulder. The blood flowed.

He went up to his adversary.

“Friend,” said he, “I was in despair for having offended you. Will you shake hands with me ?” And they flew into each other’s arms.

* * * * *

Returning home, Claude Guérin, half frantic with joy, did not cease thanking Maubray.

“We owe you our child’s life,” said he. “They shall be informed of it at the Manor ; the Marquis, Susan—”

But Maubray interrupted him.

“I do not wish them to know anything about it ; never speak to them about me. Be silent.”

Then turning towards Bernard, while Claude was getting out of the carriage, he added—

“I will write to your father to tell him how bravely you behaved.”

The wounded man lifted his eyes towards him, and fainted through loss of blood.



CHAPTER XXV.

THE BALL.

BERNARD'S wound was not a dangerous one. It kept him at home, however, for nearly a month. Maubray paid him a long visit every day. Thus, the friendship broken off at Navailles was renewed.

Claude Guérin cemented it more closely. He was truly grateful to the contractor, and would not have allowed Bernard to avoid him, much less understood his attempting to do so.

Thanks to his immense wealth and industrial fame, Maubray was well known in the Parisian world. To procure patrons and orders for his young friend he would sometimes visit the studio in company of eminent men, or wealthy amateurs.

During the winter season, Bernard was invited everywhere.

“What a strange thing that is,” he modestly said. “I am scarcely known.”

“Nothing more natural,” answered Maubray. “You have talent, and many friends. Every house is open to you. Does not some secret ambition fill your heart?”

“Mine?”

“Claude Guérin has told me so; but he is so discreet that I have never been able to ascertain what it is. To succeed, you must show yourself. Why should you not?”

“I don't like gaiety,” he answered; and it was with great difficulty he was prevailed upon to go out sometimes.

One day a grand *fête* was given for the Polish *émigrés*.

“You must come this time,” said Maubray. “A concert and a ball. Besides, a collection is to be made for the exiles. You cannot refuse to contribute your share. Is it agreed upon? I will fetch you in my carriage.”

It was a splendid *fête*. The *élite* of Parisian society was there. The saloons were brilliantly lighted up and decorated,

and showed to the greatest advantage splendid jewels and lovely ball dresses.

Maubray introduced Bernard to all his friends. He had contrived the most flattering reception for him. After the concert the ball began. The young artist wished to remain a simple spectator.

“Do you not like dancing?” asked Maubray; “nor even the fair sex?”

“Not even the fair sex,” he answered, with a smile.

“At your time of life! I am sure it is from timidity. I have friends everywhere—even lady friends, who are chaperoning rich heiresses.”

Bernard shook his head.

“You must get married some day.”

“Never!”

“Oh, oh! that is saying a great deal.”

“It is; but every one has his ideal. Mine is not here.”

And the artist went into another saloon.

Maubray looked at him as he walked, and proudly admired his beauty and elegance.

It was the young man's first introduction to high life, and he was as perfectly at ease as if he had always lived there. He looked the perfect gentleman. The red ribbon in his button hole enhanced his appearance. He concealed under his apparent coldness great imagination, and an ardent soul. For him to remain cold and indifferent in the midst of the enchantments of such a *fête*, Maubray felt persuaded his heart must be filled by one of those affections which leave no place for anything else.

Bernard went into the saloon in which the card tables were set. At one of them three gentlemen seemed to be waiting for a fourth.

The young artist recognised amongst them one of the amateurs brought to his studio by M. Maubray. He walked up to him.

"Do you play whist, M. Bernard?" asked the gentleman.

Whist was a favourite amusement at the Manor. When a schoolboy, and during the first holidays he had spent there, he had learnt to be agreeable to the Marquis. Susan,

Irene, the *curé* often, and sometimes M. Morisseau, made up the game. It was a school at which one soon became proficient.

He answered affirmatively.

“Then you are doubly welcome,” said the gentleman. “Pray take that seat. We shall all feel grateful for the favour.”

It was impossible for him to refuse an invitation made in this way.

Chance was favourable to Bernard. In four deals he had won twenty counters, and each of the players put down twenty louis.

“But, gentlemen,” exclaimed Bernard. “I had no idea I was playing for such a sum.”

“It is our custom; so now you will only risk losing our money.”

Bernard could not leave his seat.

In the next game a *chelin*. Then twice a treble, total twenty other louis.

“We are in luck,” said his partner. “We must continue.”

The luck continued. Bernard began to be greatly taken up with it. He was full of animation, handled with pleasure the gold

spread before him, and the cards which had produced it.

Suddenly, on raising his eyes, he perceived M. Maubray's disapproving look.

He blushed.

What a sum to lose, if he had lost. He almost regretted having won. The game was ended.

One of the ladies collecting the money for the Poles came to the table at which he sat.

"Gentlemen," said Bernard, rising, "M. Maubray will, I am certain, take my place. I am only an artist, and cannot accept such a large sum, won by surprise. Pray, permit the Poles to profit by it."

And all the gold he had picked up from the table he put in the lady's purse.

"A good action," said Maubray to him, in a low voice. Whilst taking the seat offered him, he added aloud—

"Thanks, M. Bernard, for giving me such a lucky place. I am certain it will be even more so now."

* * * * *

Towards morning, when they were returning home together. "Are you aware," said the artist, "you have given me a second lesson—at least as good as the first?"

"Oh! oh!"

"Who knows but that I might have become a gambler, had it not been for the warning I read in your look. But it is over now, I am cured."

"Indeed, then I have some influence over you."

"You have," replied the young man, who became pensive.

They remained silent a few moments.

"It is quite natural," resumed Maubray, giving vent to his feelings. "We generally love those who love us, and I really am very much attached to you. Why?—how that affection begun I know not. Perhaps because I have no family, no children of my own—and that I am getting old. If I only had a son like yourself. Did you not ask me for the cause of the interest I felt for you?"

that is it!" Then taking hold of his hand he pressed it between his own.

"Do not refuse me a little friendship," he continued, with tears in his eyes. "It will be my consolation, my happiness. But we are getting sentimental, and you are at home. Good night, or rather good morning, Bernard!"

Dawn was peeping through the glass of the *coupé* when it stopped.

As Bernard was getting out backwards, bending towards Maubray, he suddenly seized hold of him and kissed him.

"Sir!" murmured Bernard, surprised and agitated by this unexpected caress.

"It is for your father!"

And closing the carriage, he ordered the coachman to start at once.

* * * * *

Towards the middle of April, on a fine spring morning, Maubray called at the studio.

Bernard was absent; but Claude was at home.

“ I am delighted to find you alone,” said the contractor, “ I wish to speak to you.”

“ What about ? ” asked the painter.

“ About him ! about Bernard ! ”

“ Willingly,” said Claude, “ you know how much I am attached to that good young man. I was the first to guide him in his career, and for the last ten years he has never left me. I love him as much as if he were my son.”

“ So do I,” said Maubray.

Then, lighting a cigar, the following conversation commenced.





CHAPTER XXVI.

SAINT CECILIA.

* * * * *

“WHERE is Bernard?”

“Gone to the Bois de Boulogne. I have prescribed a day of rest and amusement; he works too hard.”

“Why? what is his aim?”

“He is impatient of acquiring a name.”

“But he is already in a fair way to fame, I think, and the exhibition opens in a month’s time. His pictures are almost finished, he has plenty of time to give them the last touch. His success will be enthusiastic; I think I have had some share in preparing it.”

“I know it,” said Claude, “and I thank you for both of us.”

“But,” resumed Maubray, “love of his

art is not the only one that inspires him—he has another stimulus, has he not ? ”

“ Pooh ! pooh ! ”

“ That stimulus I have been looking for and cannot find. You are much more his confidant that I am, my dear Guérin. Where is the lady ? ”

“ You ask me a very serious question,” said the artist. “ Bernard fancies he has hidden his secret, even from me.”

“ Then he has a secret ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ I was certain of it ! He is a fine young man, of an affectionate disposition. He must have a mistress.”

“ There, the stimulus is not.”

“ Bah ! ”

“ Mistresses prevent your working, and Bernard has never even slackened his labour. He has not lived like a saint. A few flirtations have crossed his youth. I have known many a poor girl dreadfully in love with him ! ”

“ And he ? ”

“He did all he could to try to love them. Once even, he threw himself headlong into gaieties. But his head alone was taken. He may shake off thought, but he cannot forget.”

“Then he is in love?”

“I am afraid of it.”

“A married woman perhaps?” anxiously asked Maubray.

“No, Bernard is an honest man,” replied the austere Claude.

“Then some young girl, whose relations are very rich, and—”

“Not that either.”

“What is it then? Pray do speak. Together, perhaps, we may be able to find some means of surmounting the obstacle.”

Guérin shook his head doubtfully. Then as Maubray insisted—

“Let us go into his apartment,” he said, “there you will understand it all.”

* * * * *

In the darkest part of Bernard's studio, on an easel, wrapped up with thick tapestry, one could guess a picture hidden from every eye.

A silk string tied under the frame prevented the folds of the curtain from being drawn.

Guérin bolted the doors. He untied the cord, opened the curtain.

Maubray, still at a distance, perceived a most beautiful picture of St. Cecilia.

“Why is it hidden?” he exclaimed. “He never was better inspired. This is his masterpiece!”

“It is,” murmured the old artist, opening the window, to allow the light to fall on the picture. “Yes, Bernard has thrown his whole soul in it! But, pray recall your memories—it is a portrait. Do you not recognise her?”

“Mdlle. de Navailles!” exclaimed Maubray, who now understood everything.

Saint Cecilia was Irene!

“That,” said Claude, “is his secret—his love—and hopeless!”

“Hopeless! why should it be? Bernard is acquiring fame and fortune. If I am not mistaken the Marquis is poor.”

“You forget his rank!”

“ He loves Bernard—he is just and good.”

“ Granted, but his pride blinds him to that degree, he has never even suspected love could spring up between the last of the Navailles, and the nameless orphan he had adopted.”

“ But Bernard—”

“ Bernard is as proud as the Marquis. Brought up in that family, he has sworn to himself to respect it. Neither word nor look, have ever betrayed his heart. When he arrives at the Manor, he displays the joy, the tenderness of a brother, nothing more. When he feels his courage failing him, he leaves it, he flies. Remember how sad and thoughtful he is. Until this day I alone have read his thoughts. A vague hope supports him, but if he were forced to give it up, if she he adores, became the bride of another—I shudder at the very thought; it would cause Bernard's death.”

For an instant both men remained silent; they were equally overpowered. Maubray was the first to speak.

“But—Mdlle. de Navailles?”

Old Claude looked up doubtfully.

“Do you think she has guessed his secret? do you believe she loves him?”

“I cannot say she does; but I can no more say she does not. Eighteen months ago, during the last visit we paid together at the Manor, that hope shot through my mind that Bernard might some day be happy.”

“How so?”

“Mdlle. Navailles was just seventeen. A young Englishman, a relation of her mother's, who was going to the south of France, made a short stay at the Manor. He was a handsome young man; immensely rich, a member of the House of Lords. He bore the title of duke. His cousin's beauty seemed to have made a deep impression on him. I shall never forget how sad and miserable Bernard was. He suffered cruelly, for he was jealous.”

“Poor boy!”

“The young lord was in every way worthy of affection—he was deeply enamoured. He left the Manor suddenly. The Marquis was

in a state of great irritation. His anger burst before us all in the evening. Mdlle. de Navailles had refused to become a duchess."

"Ah!"

"However, she succeeded in calming her grandfather. She wished to remain near him, she said; she would only marry a man who consented not to separate them. During this speech she looked at Bernard! Even now I can see her tender, chaste, and firm look. 'Do not lose courage,' it said; 'I am waiting for you.'"

"Well, very well!" exclaimed Maubray, deeply moved. "We must have confidence in the future," he continued. "She loves Bernard."

"But how are the Marquis's scruples to be vanquished—how is he to be decided?"

"Who knows? At all events we must try."

* * * * *

An hour later the contractor was at home. His head resting on his hand, he was deeply lost in thought.

Suddenly, taking a generous resolution, he wrote the following letter to Susan :—

“I have kept my word, and remained silent. That you are, no doubt, aware of.

“But I have seen Bernard, observed him, and perhaps been useful to him.

“There are services and advices which can only come from a father; things he alone can guess.

“Susan, do not refuse to see me. It is necessary for his happiness—for his life.

“I shall be at Navailles in a few days, there I hope to find your answer, one single word to say you grant the interview.

“Wednesday evening, at nine o'clock, in the ruins of the old castle.

“It is but two steps from the Manor; you can come there in an instant and for one instant.

“If I must do so, I shall wait for you there the whole night.

“Pray come! Answer, I entreat of you, in Bernard's name.”

* * * * *

The next evening Susan received the letter.

In spite of his promise, Claude had hidden nothing from the Marquis. Susan knew the history of the duel, and of all the services Maubray had rendered Bernard. She did not hesitate one instant, and answered him immediately.

The answer she herself took to the post-office.

Maubray not having arrived, it was received by the agent.

Thillard, more disagreeable, less occupied than ever, had no other amusement than that offered by the cellar of the Château, and Heaven knows the use he made of it. His stomach began to feel the effects of his intemperance. He was ill.

On that evening we find him seated near a large fire in his own room.

The kettle is boiling. The tea things set on the table.

The agent is alone, busy turning over a letter which puzzles and disquiets him.

“The village post mark! What can this letter contain? Who can have written to Maubray? Perhaps some fresh complaint, some impeachment against me. In that case I ought to confiscate it. It must not reach him.”

Thillard possessed all sorts of petty talents. Pouring some boiling water in a cup he held the envelope over it. The gum, heated by the steam, melted. With a little precaution he opened it.

He took out the letter, which contained this simple sentence, without any signature—
“I shall be there.”

“What can it mean?” he murmured.

And closing the envelope, so as to escape detection, he strained his brains to read the enigma.





CHAPTER XXVII.

LITTLE BIRDS.

ON the day preceding the events recorded in our last chapter, the Marquis had received a visit from M. Froment and his son.

The old countryman was dressed in his Sunday best suit, and Anthony himself looked solemn.

“We are come to beg of you to grant us a great favour,” said the latter to the Marquis.

“What is it to be?”

“First,” said the father, “allow me to inform you, I have decidedly gone over to my son’s opinion.”

“Ah, ah!”

“Yes! I no longer refuse to credit facts, sir. The second crop promises to be more astonishing than the first. I had consented

to give him my answer in April, the time has expired ; besides, I must own it, I am highly flattered to hear everybody praise him. What was it I wished ? That my son should be a credit to me, that he should not be a farmer. He is an *agronome*, as the Préfect says. In short, we are the best of friends."

"I congratulate you both," said the Marquis ; "but I do not see as yet how I can be of use to you."

"I am coming to that, sir," said the father, with a little less assurance. It was my duty to pay the earnest of reconciliation—a dowry—for there is a marriage in expectation."

"Your son wishes to get married ?" asked the nobleman.

"Yes, sir," replied Anthony.

"And who is the fair lady you have chosen, young man ? I congratulate her in advance, for I have great esteem for you, and I am certain she will be happy."

Anthony hesitated to answer, and looked at his father.

“I must speak, then,” said he. “Well, so be it. She is not very rich; but so honourable that I do not dare ask her of her father. If it was not taking too great a liberty, sir, I would request of you to come there with us.”

“I know the father, then?”

“Certainly, as Anthony’s godmother would say; it is the good dame who advised me to ask you to support our demand. The father is your friend, and can refuse you nothing.”

“And he is?”

“Our worthy magistrate, M. Morisseau.”

“Agathe!” exclaimed the old gentleman. “I ought to have guessed it. Bravo! Anthony! you are taking a wife worthy of yourself. I am delighted with your proposal, my friends; I accept most willingly. But how long have you loved her, my boy?”

“Always!” answered Anthony.

“And do you think she has any idea of it?”

“I hope so. She promised me she would obey her father.”

“He will certainly give his consent,” added the Marquis. “We were going to his house to-morrow. Irene intended paying a visit to Agathe. It is audience day. Shall we make an agreement to meet there, M. Froment?”

“My Lord, I shall be greatly honoured.”

Things being thus settled, the next morning they started for the borough.

After having left Irene with Agathe, the Marquis directed his steps towards the Town Hall.

The audience room was on the ground floor, the windows looking towards the square.

On account of the mildness of the weather, they were all open. The old gentleman drew near one of them and looked inside.

The audience room was crowded.

Before the bar stood a dozen young boys, quite abashed and awaiting the sentence the magistrate was going to pronounce against them.

“It looks like a school,” thought the Marquis.

Old Froment was standing near another window ; he went up to him, and asked him in a low voice, " what was the matter ? "

" They have been bird's nesting," he answered. " That is forbidden now, it seems."

The young culprits were accompanied by their parents. Several forest keepers of the neighbourhood were the accusers.

Peter Morisseau was speaking—

" It is not out of love for birds that the law orders you to respect their nests ; it is your own interests, the interests of agriculture. Who destroys insects ? the bird. That is what God creates it for, that is its providential mission. What is the scourge of your fields, the enemy of your harvest ? the insect. You are well aware how fast they multiply and increase. What do they live upon ? Is it not on our most precious plants ?

" There is not a plant, not a tree, which has not some special grub attached to it. Oaks, elms, pines, firs, apple trees, olive trees,

nothing can resist their baneful influence. The weevil destroys our corn, another worm, our vines. Whole vineyards have been rooted up, and forests burnt to the ground to put a stop to the scourge. Man is powerless against it. He can build ships to cross the ocean, pierce mountains, embank rivers, dig canals, and construct railroads. Every animal is tamed or killed by him; but his strength becomes weakness before the myriads of insects which come swarming on his fields from every part of the world, destroying the corn grown so laboriously. His eye is not piercing enough to perceive a great many of them; his hand is too heavy and too slow to strike them. And besides, were he even to crush millions of them, ten times their number would come to life. Right and left, high and low, even in the bowels of the earth, their innumerable legions succeed one another without rest or truce. Of this indestructible army to which we are exposed, each has its month, its day, its season, its fighting post.

“Not one of them ever makes the slightest mistake; and from the beginning of ages, man must have succumbed under this unequal struggle, if God had not given him in the bird a powerful auxiliary, a faithful ally, who wonderfully accomplishes the work of destruction man cannot even undertake. Birds can exist without man; man could not live without birds.”

“Upon my word!” said the Marquis, “this is a lecture, not a judgment.”

These last arguments had, in fact, been read by the magistrate in a pamphlet, of which about a hundred copies were placed before him.

“However,” began one of the culprit’s father’s, “it is not our fault if the children—”

“You are civilly answerable for them to law! Besides, I think you had better not speak! Do you not set them the example? Ignorant and ungrateful as you are, do you not proudly nail on your gates the owl, and all the nocturnal birds which wage such a terrible war against all sorts of rats and mice,

whose depredations you are well acquainted with, whether before the harvest or in your barns. A pair of osprey destroy one hundred and fifty little nibblers every day ; a buzzard six thousand mice a year ! I defy you to find a cat better acquainted with his business ! ”

A good-humoured laugh rose in the assembly.

“ As to these young knaves,” resumed M. Morisseau, “ you allow them to play truant to go bird’s nesting. Unfeeling children ! nothing is spared by them, the young birds are starved or tortured, the eggs strung or broken. And, far from sending them back to school properly flogged, with cold indifference you allow those cruel acts to be performed. Are you not aware that it is written in the Scriptures : ‘ If, while walking in the fields, you see on a tree, or find on the ground, a bird’s nest, with the mother sitting on it, thou shalt not take the mother nor the young birds, but thou shalt let them go free, so that no evil shall come to thee, and that thou mayest live long.’ ”

The magistrate paused an instant, and then proceeded—

“If you are not acquainted with the Scriptures, you ought to know your own interest. It is no novelty for a child to bring home a hundred eggs of all sorts after a day’s rambling. It has been calculated that more than one hundred millions of eggs a year are destroyed in France; calculate the myriads of insects those birds deprived of life would have destroyed. The smallest are the most useful. Who could watch the almost invisible weevil, when in the middle of a corn field, it is preparing to lay its eggs on the almost unformed grains? Who could seize the small vine grub, butterfly, when with the same intention it flutters round the vines; or the caterpillar of the same insect, when not more than four or five millimetres in length it leaves its abode in the spring? Who could reach those microscopic eggs of which a titmouse eats more than two hundred thousand in one year.

“Nightingales, tomtits, redbreasts, wagtails,

wrens and all the small beaks do the same. The rook is the enemy of the white grub. If you only knew the enormous quantity devoured by the swallow. In a martlet's stomach a naturalist counted more than four hundred insects, almost as many in a winter tomtit's, the greatest part of which were vine grubs and weevils. The weevil produces from seventy to ninety eggs, which it deposits in as many grains of wheat, there they become larva and devour the whole grain, so that a single weevil destroys the whole ear.

“ The vine grub is not less destructive ; it lays on the vine leaf from one hundred to one hundred and fifty eggs, which produce as many caterpillars. These, after having remained hidden under the bark during the winter, come forth in the spring, to eat up the leaves and the buds. Thus a single vine grub destroys from one hundred to one hundred and thirty bunches of grapes in the bud. Now only reckon—and the naturalist has made that calculation—the services rendered by the tomtit, which destroys in

one day five hundred of these noxious insects. It is by thousands you ought to reckon the grains of corn, the bunches of grapes saved in one day by this little bird."

With indignation the magistrate continued—

"And those young rascals prevent their birth or kill them. And you, yourselves, later by all possible means, allowed or forbidden, you destroy those friends, as charming as they are indispensable, and which God in His goodness has granted you. It is for your sakes, for the security of your harvests, that God has provided them with such an enormous appetite. Even those who pilfer your fruit have saved you a hundred times more than they have taken. In Paris, on a terrace, the deposits of cockchafers thrown from a sparrow's nest were collected together; there were fourteen hundred, so that a single breed of those birds had destroyed seven hundred! We shall soon now have the cockchafer's visit. All sorts of insects already swarm the country. I will not allow the birds' nests to be touched! I ought to

punish these children for having begun their impious war; the law is severe, from sixteen to two hundred francs fine. And the parents would be obliged to pay it. I will be merciful this time, but never do it again. So that you should not forget what I have said; take this small tract home with you, you will find in it what I have told you, but expressed in much better terms. It is one of President Bonjean's speeches,* it is the work of a clever man and of a noble heart. I should be happy if these few pages, so full of sound advice, were known in every village. Distribute them in yours, and by reading them learn henceforward to respect birds and their nests !”

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"Pray, explain your meaning."

"Oh! not in this place—at your own house," answered the old gentleman. "Family affairs can only be treated at home."

A few moments later they were assembled there. Old Froment, more solemn than ever, begged of the Marquis to speak. The latter, after having presented Anthony's proposal, added—

"It is one of those honest and desired affections, which, born in childhood, increase with increasing years, and which are blessed of God. Anthony has worked bravely to win his wife. All the farms in the estate will soon be his. You will have your children near you. They will be a forcible proof that duty and happiness do not exist in towns alone, and that fortune is to be met with in villages as well."

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He opened the door and called her. Agathe was in the next room. Irene had already informed her of the purport of their journey. Her modest blush on her entrance, enhanced her loveliness.

“These looks spare all preambles,” said her father. “You know what these gentlemen have come to ask me—what is your answer to their proposal?” Agathe with

nothing can resist their baneful influence. The weevil destroys our corn, another worm, our vines. Whole vineyards have been rooted up, and forests burnt to the ground to put a stop to the scourge. Man is powerless against it. He can build ships to cross the ocean, pierce mountains, embank rivers, dig canals, and construct railroads. Every animal is tamed or killed by him; but his strength becomes weakness before the myriads of insects which come swarming on his fields from every part of the world, destroying the corn grown so laboriously. His eye is not piercing enough to perceive a great many of them; his hand is too heavy and too slow to strike them. And besides, were he even to crush millions of them, ten times their number would come to life. Right and left, high and low, even in the bowels of the earth, their innumerable legions succeed one another without rest or truce. Of this indestructible army to which we are exposed, each has its month, its day, its season, its fighting post.

“Not one of them ever makes the slightest mistake; and from the beginning of ages, man must have succumbed under this unequal struggle, if God had not given him in the bird a powerful auxiliary, a faithful ally, who wonderfully accomplishes the work of destruction man cannot even undertake. Birds can exist without man; man could not live without birds.”

“Upon my word!” said the Marquis, “this is a lecture, not a judgment.”

These last arguments had, in fact, been read by the magistrate in a pamphlet, of which about a hundred copies were placed before him.

“However,” began one of the culprit’s father’s, “it is not our fault if the children—”

“You are civilly answerable for them to law! Besides, I think you had better not speak! Do you not set them the example? Ignorant and ungrateful as you are, do you not proudly nail on your gates the owl, and all the nocturnal birds which wage such a terrible war against all sorts of rats and mice,

whose depredations you are well acquainted with, whether before the harvest or in your barns. A pair of osprey destroy one hundred and fifty little nibblers every day ; a buzzard six thousand mice a year ! I defy you to find a cat better acquainted with his business ! ”

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“These looks spare all preambles,” said her father. “You know what these gentlemen have come to ask me—what is your answer to their proposal?” Agathe with

downcast looks, and a happy smile playing on her lips, hid her blushes in her father's bosom. He kissed her forehead, and then led her to M. Froment, whose eyes were filled with by tears.

"Come, Froment," said he, "will you not also kiss your daughter?"

"You are two happy men," said the Marquis, "Mdlle. de Navailles has refused me this joy—Prince Charming has come to you."

"He is not the only one in the world," said Agathe. "Another will come, more to her taste, that I could almost answer for!"





CHAPTER XXVIII.

IN WHICH THILLARD MAKES HIMSELF KNOWN.

CURIOSITY was one of Thillard's least failings.

Mortal envy, thoughts of robbery and murder, had suggested themselves to his mind by the knowledge of Maubray's millions. He sought for some opportunity, no matter what, of taking possession of some large sum and absconding with it. The rents he received were not a sufficient prey for such a man. How many plans did he not form in his solitude. He made up his mind to crouch and cringe before his master, so as to lull his suspicions, and then suddenly, audaciously and cruelly reward him for his past kindness.

The letter in which he had read that sentence "I shall be there" had brought hope to his perverse mind.

Inspired by the spirit of evil, he felt his opportunity was now at hand.

Maubray arrived before day-break. The agent was called up, and he hastened to ask him whether he had not received a letter addressed to him. Thillard gave him the note.

Whilst reading it Maubray could not repress a movement of joy.

It must be very important, thought Thillard, who was anxiously examining his countenance.

"I feel tired," said the contractor to him, "and will take a little rest. I will see you when I rise," and without answering the obsequious protestations of his ancient companion, he went into his own room.

About ten, whilst Thillard was prowling about the house, Maubray appeared at his window and called him.

"Come to my room," said he.

The steward found his master seated before a desk, on which a thick pocket-book was lying.

"I have slept too long," said he, "for I was expected at the railroad. After to-

morrow is pay day. You must carry these ten thousand francs to the director of the works."

The bank notes had been taken from the pocket book, which seemed full of them.

This detail did not escape Thillard.

"I shall see you by and by. I am to breakfast at Anthony's, and shall not return before the evening."

The steward left him.

A few moments later, Maubray was directing his steps towards the farm. Thillard, who had not left the house, returned into Maubray's room and ran to the desk.

It was locked.

With the help of a bunch of small keys he had brought with him, he vainly tried to open it.

He fetched some wax and took the impression of the lock.

And then, only, he left the Château.

* * * * *

The most cordial hospitality awaited Maubray at the farm.

Anthony, Dame Certainly, Therese, all strove to prove their affection and gratitude to him. They informed him of the intended wedding, which had been decided on the previous day.

“ I was going to write to you about it,” said Anthony, “ and to ask you to honour it with your presence. Bernard is coming, he is to be my first witness, pray grant me the favour of being the other. You will meet the Marquis, Mdlle. De Navailles, and Susan.

“ I regret to say it will be utterly impossible for me to do so ; I am going on a long journey. But my best wishes will accompany you, and you must allow me to send my present to the bride. In the meantime, accept my sincere congratulations, Anthony. It is a good thing to marry young. You can then hope to see your grandchildren growing around you.”

After breakfast, the landlord and his young farmer went to take a walk in the country. Walking down a hollow path, they suddenly heard a horse neigh.

“That,” said Anthony, “is the Brigadier of Gendarmerie’s horse. We have been keeping it for some time. A poacher, pursued too closely, lodged a ball in his jaws. It was to have been *reformed*, but the worthy Gendarme loves his horse, and the animal is not ungrateful. It had been put in a pasture near the village to get well; but they could not keep it there, it was constantly running to the barracks. I can assure you it knows its way there. The Brigadier thought of my enclosure; its high hedges and gate cannot be leapt over. Without them it would have been utterly impossible to secure the fugitive.”

“But what makes him so uneasy at our approach?”

Anthony, who had been looking enquiringly about him, saw the Brigadier coming along the footpath, rolling the stones under his heavy boots.

“No wonder; the horse has scented his master.”

The Gendarme soon joined them. He was in the prime of life, with an honest and

martial physiognomy. A brave soldier, and an honest man. It was during the *assemblée constituante* that the corps of Gendarmerie was created, on the 1st of January, 1791. Before that time, the *maréchaussée* alone was known in France—a militia for which the people had no sympathy; whilst the Gendarmes are esteemed and loved by every one.

They are devoted to, and especially serviceable in, the country. A kind of patriarchal good nature is mixed with their military authority. Chosen from amongst the best soldiers, their only enemies are the malevolent creatures against whom they protect the country. In cases of inundations, fires, any evil whatever, public or private danger, they are at hand, protecting, tranquillising, saving.

Marshal Pélissier has said of them—

“I do not know any corps having a greater right to honour.”

And Marshal Bugeaud—

“Every member in the Gendarmerie feels that he is bound for the whole corps.”

We must now return to our Brigadier.

“Good morning, gentlemen,” said he, “I have walked from town, so that Jupiter should not be jealous. Poor Jupiter! Pray, excuse me; he is waiting for me.”

They were in front of the gate where the horse was running to and fro, neighing and wild with joy at the approach of his master.

He pranced round him, then came and leant his head on his shoulder, begging for a caress, which the Brigadier granted instantly. He stroked his horse and spoke to it. He offered him sugar, but the good animal was so happy that he did not even seem to see it. They were equally delighted.

Maubray and Anthony were standing in the middle of the road looking at them.

“Good-by Jupiter, I will come back in a few days and take you home with me. You must be patient, my poor horse; it is for your good! Will you let me get out? Be off! Come now, do; you must! *Sacre bleu!* will you get out of my way!” and taking advantage of a spring the horse had made, he slid through the gate, shutting it quickly

after him. But Jupiter would not let him get away so quietly. He rushed against the obstacle, ran along the hedge, looking for issue, and neighing with rage.

“His wound maddens him,” said the Gendarme, “and I must go. Once more I thank you, M. Anthony. He is better ; I will rid you of him in a few days. But do not allow any one to enter the enclosure carelessly, and let it be constantly shut ; otherwise Jupiter would gallop home. Good-by, Jupiter, good-by.”

And the Brigadier disappeared.

“Suppose we went and looked at the heath,” proposed Maubray.

“We have splendid ryethere,” said Anthony, “next year it shall be corn.”

“We are not far from the place, I believe ?”

“Two steps only. See, there it is, on the platform, at the foot of the ruins of the old castle.”

“Show me the way to them. I may take it into my head to visit them some day.”

Then they continued their walk. When M. Maubray returned home in the evening, Thillard was still absent.

* * * * *

Instead of directing his steps towards the Château on his return, Thillard had gone to the village.

He entered a locksmith's shop, to whom he showed the impression he had taken of the lock.

"We have lost the key," said he, "can you make one immediately from this model?"

The man said he would, but it would take a few hours.

"I will call for it," said Thillard.

A few steps further, on the same footpath, at a cutler's, he bought a large clasp-knife, pointed like a stiletto.

Then he went into a coffee-house to read the papers, and drank several glasses of brandy. He seemed to require nerve.

At the time appointed by the locksmith, the key was not ready.

To while away his time, he went to the terminus to ascertain that the train hours were not altered, and that the express going to Paris always passed at a few minutes before twelve.

At last the key was given to him.

“But perhaps it may require filing,” said the locksmith.

“Then lend me a file, and a few of those small hooks you use for picking locks. If we do not succeed you shall be sent for from the Château to-morrow.”

When he got home it was quite dark.

In front of the house, looking on the park, two windows alone were lighted up—those in Maubray's bedroom.

“He is there,” thought Thillard, shuddering.

In the dining-room, near the half-cleared table, Françoise was slumbering on a chair.

“Master has had his supper,” she said to the steward, who woke her.

“Very well; you can go to bed, if he requires anything I will give it him.”

The servant left the room. She lived with her husband, at the other extremity of the court-yard, in the porter's lodge.

"Now I am alone with him in the house," said he; and returning into the garden, he went and stood opposite the two lighted windows.

In about a quarter of an hour's time the light was put out.

"He will soon be asleep," thought he.

Suddenly the noise of a door opening in the garden struck his ear.

It was that of a staircase leading directly to Maubray's room.

A man, muffled up in a cloak, came through it. The steward recognised his master.

Thillard had hidden himself behind a bush.

After having looked around him, Maubray crossed the garden and the park, and went out through the gate which opened into the country.

"Splendid," said Thillard; "it is a nocturnal rendezvous. He will probably not return before to-morrow morning. He will

not immediately think about his pocket-book, and I shall be two hundred leagues from here, without having been obliged to use my knife."

The wretch had gone towards the house. He went through the side door, rapidly ascended the stairs, and ran to the desk.

It was open !

Thillard lit the candle with a trembling hand, and searched everywhere. The pocket book was gone.

"He has taken it with him !" he exclaimed.

"Oh, I will join him."

And, feverish with passion and hatred, he rushed out of the house.

The night was dark. Heavy clouds ran along the stormy sky. Now and then the moon appeared, shining brightly over the whole country.

When Thillard got on to the road he looked around, endeavouring to pierce the darkness which surrounded him. A sudden ray of light permitted him to catch a glimpse of

Maubray, as he disappeared behind an eminence.

Gliding and bounding by turns, like a savage following his enemy, Thillard continued his pursuit.

The noise of the storm deadened that of his step.





CHAPTER XXIX.

AMBUSCADE.

ON a night such as this was, the ruins of the old castle bore a fantastic appearance.

Among the fallen buildings, the broken arches, the open towers, ivy, climbing plants, trees even, had grown and intermingled on all sides with the picturesque ruins. Convolvulus and branches, briar and dead leaves, all rustled under the breeze, all were animated when the moon's furtive rays dissipated the darkness.

Maubray had stopped under the porch.

Leaning against a part of the broken wall, he waited.

“ Susan had promised to come ; but might she not change her mind at the last moment ? Something might prevent her doing so, detain her ; would she come ? ”

Absorbed in his thoughts, a light footstep, but which ceased instantly, met his ear.

He started joyfully, and looked around him.

Nothing! Nothing, as yet!

“I must have been mistaken,” thought he. “Some wild animal, no doubt, caused the noise.”

Maubray had almost guessed the truth.

Thillard was near him. Crouching under the vault, holding his knife ready, he was watching his prey.

It was a good opportunity; but the wretch was a coward. Fear had stayed his hand!

“He is expecting some one—perhaps several persons—they may be coming. If I missed him, and he called out for help! No! I will wait till they are gone! That will be safer.”

At last, on the road leading to the Manor, a shadow appeared coming towards the ruins. Maubray walked towards it.

It was Susan.

"Thank you for coming," said he.

"I am aware of the protection with which you have surrounded Bernard," she answered tremulously. "You wish to see me for his future welfare, his happiness. Here I am; but my absence might be remarked; pray speak quickly!"

"Susan, I have discovered a secret, which you do not even suspect. At least, I think so."

"What secret?"

"Bernard's heart is filled with an affection which will reduce his whole life to despair. He loves Mdle. de Navailles."

"Ah! it is just as I feared," exclaimed the terrified mother. "The Marquis will never consent."

"Not even if Bernard were rich?" asked Maubray.

"Rich! how could that be?"

"Pray, Susan, do not be offended at what I am going to say. Suppose Bernard's father was dead, and that, having found out your retreat, on his death bed, to expiate his crime he had sent you a fortune?"

“But,” said Susan, “that would be falsehood.”

“Unknown to every one except ourselves. I have proved to you that if in my youth I could forget a sacred promise, I am now no longer the same. Susan, this pocket book contains a million in American notes. Accept it; it is Bernard’s dowry.”

She refused by a sign.

“Maubray,” she said, “do not be offended if I refuse your generous offer. I am deeply affected by it; but for Bernard’s honour, I cannot—will not, accept it.”

“I will force you to it!”

“How so?” she enquired, with a proud smile.

“I will send you the money in an anonymous letter, which will justify the gift. When against your own will, you hold Bernard’s happiness in your own hands, you will not dare to disinherit him. I defy you to do so.”

“Do not do such a thing,” she said, with energetic calmness. “I cannot deceive my

son—I will not. That is an irrevocable resolution.”

Maubray put the notes in his pocket.

After having walked about with much agitation, he returned to Susan.

“There is another way of doing it,” said he; “and now it is the whole of my inheritance I offer Bernard. Susan, that promise, to which I failed five and twenty years ago, allow me now to keep it. Let our child become legitimate. Become my wife.”

Overcome by emotion, Susan could only hide her face with her hands.

And when he repeated his proposal, a prayer escaped from his heart.

“Do not speak so,” she murmured.

“Why should I not? Would not that just reparation honour us both? I am now almost an old man—a friend—an honest man, who has but one fault to reproach himself with in his whole career, and who begs of you to allow him to redeem it. Let me again be worthy of my own esteem. If you wish it I will leave you the day after our marriage.

You shall never see me again—never. We shall only be united in our affection for our child.”

Trembling with emotion, he begged of her to answer him.

“It is a dream,” she said, in a tremulous voice. “If I only listened to your generous words. But reason—Bernard—you must grant me time for reflection. He must—he shall—know everything. He will answer you himself—you must wait. But from this moment I forgive you all my sufferings—and as a friend, I offer you my hand.”

Maubray pressed it between his own.

For a few moments both were too much moved to be able to speak; they could only look at each other, while the tears flowed from their eyes.

“Return to the Manor, Susan,” said Maubray. “I will wait. God bless you.”

Susan repeated, “God bless you,” and left him.

* * * * *

Maubray followed her with his eyes, his heart bounding with joy and hope.

She had disappeared, and certainly must have reached the Manor.

Still Maubraystood motionless and charmed, dreaming of happiness for the future.

The spot, the time, all were forgotten ; he neither saw nor heard.

Thillard, however, was creeping towards him.

Suddenly throwing his hands out, Maubray uttered a loud groan, and fell senseless on the ground.

Thillard had stabbed him with his knife.

Struck with terror, the cowardly assassin drew back.

His victim, convulsed by agony, uttered another groan and seemingly expired.

“ At last ! ” exclaimed Thillard ; yet he dared not approach. He was afraid.

However, he advanced a few steps, then bent over the body, and, with a trembling hand, searched his pockets, and seized hold of the pocket book.

“ A million ! ” he exclaimed ; “ it contains a million ! and all the notes are payable to the

bearer! No witness! no proofs! People seldom come here. A few days may pass before anything is discovered. I shall have got to England, on my way to America! Ah! ah! *I* do not refuse this million! Now I shall be rich for ever!"

Whilst he was speaking, he crawled through the thicket. He crossed the ruins, and through the hollow pathway which sloped down on the other side, he fled.





CHAPTER XXX.

HOSPITALITY.

THE village Curé was spending the evening at the Manor.

He was playing backgammon with the Marquis.

Irene, seated near them, was busy at some needlework, when Susan returned into the drawing-room.

“What had become of you?” asked Mdlle. de Navailles. “I was looking for you just now, and—”

“I have been for a walk,” answered Susan, who seated herself near the same lamp, to work at the tapestry she held in her hand.

“You must have taken cold,” observed the young girl, “for you are very pale.”

“Yes, I was not very well, but I am much better now.”

The Marquis very fortunately turned off the conversation.

“I have lost once more!” he exclaimed. “Chance favours you this evening, Monsieur le Curé. Shall we play another game?”

“Is it not very late?” asked the priest.

“Not more than half-past nine,” replied the nobleman. “I will drive you home. Irene, ring for Ambroise, and tell him to get the carriage ready.”

Mdlle. de Navailles obeyed.

The dice were once more rolling, Irene and Susan were once more at their work.

It was one of those mild and calm evenings of a country life in which work and cards seem to help to spend the time.

Few words were spoken. Now and then an exclamation or a joke from one of the players.

The ladies were lost in thought. Susan had never been so silent. Her thoughts were directed towards Bernard and Maubray. She could see him; she heard him still. Her mind was wandering in the ruins of the

castle. Even the hope he had just given her, disquieted her. Would it not be too much happiness? A foreboding that it would not be realised, but would vanish, was mingled with her joy, and communicated to her sense a sort of second sight; the least noise startled her.

“What is the matter with you, Susan?” Irene had several times asked in a low voice. “One would think you were expecting, dreading something.”

“Nothing, nothing,” replied she. “I am nervous. I am certain we are going to have a storm.”

Ill chance pursued the Marquis. He was beaten once more.

“Come,” said the Curé, “as you are going to drive me home, I will give you your revenge.”

The clock struck ten without any one perceiving it.

Suddenly Susan looked up—

“Did you not hear?”

“What?” softly asked Irene.

“ A shriek ! ”

“ No ! ”

“ Listen ! ”

They did so. The deepest silence ensued. The young girl was beginning to smile, when another cry was heard. Susan put her hand to her heart, and rose ; she was even paler than before.

Her eyes, fixed and wide open, seemed to be looking through the walls at something which terrified her.

“ They are country people calling one another,” said Irene to quiet her.

Brian began to howl.

In her anxiety, Susan ran to the window, and opened the curtains. This window looked on to the yard.

The dog, whose barking increased, now bounded with all his might against the gate of the Manor. The bell was pulled with a trembling hand.

Ambroise, who was harnessing the horse, went and opened it.

By the light of the lantern the old servant

held in his hand, Susan perceived some one who tottered a few steps, and then fell on the threshold.

“ Oh ! some accident has happened ! ” she exclaimed ; and first of all, she rushed out of the house. Through the door she had left open, Ambroise’s cries for help were heard.

“ Help ! help ! ” he exclaimed ; “ a man has been murdered. He is dying ; it is M. Maubray ! ”

Susan was in the yard in an instant, where everybody followed her.

* * * * *

Ambroise had spoken truly. After M. Thillard’s departure, this is what had happened. The coolness of the night had revived Maubray. He felt that he was mortally wounded ; but he would not die thus. What would become of Bernard ?

His signature, a few words, would be sufficient to insure his inheritance to him. The only house near at hand was ten minutes’ walk from where he lay, and that was the Manor.

Maubray crawled there, supported, upheld by paternal affection. More than once he

had fallen, but he had managed to get on his legs again.

“Oh, God! grant me time and strength to get there!” was his constant prayer. “It is for him I pray! for my son!”

And unmindful of his sufferings, overcoming his weakness by some new effort of will, he dragged himself on.

When he reached the gate, he staggered up to the chain which hung at the side of the door, and rung the bell.

The rest has been told.

* * * * *

Susan, kneeling near Maubray, supported him in her arms.

Irene, the Marquis, the Curé, stood around her. Maubray had fainted; he was covered with blood.

The Marquis declared that the wound was mortal.

He ordered Marianne to bring some mattresses down in the drawing-room.

“I will go for the doctor myself,” he said. “I will bring him back sooner.” And getting into the carriage, he started at once.

“I will remain here,” the Curé had said to him; “you may depend on me.”

With the help of Ambroise, he had succeeded in carrying the wounded man into the house.

Maubray, who had been placed on a couch, opened his eyes, recognised Susan, and feebly said—

“Write! I will write.”

Irene brought all that was requisite.

The dying man traced a few lines, and gave them to Susan. A grateful sigh escaped his lips; then, exhausted by the exertion, he fainted again.

During this time the servants had made up a bed at the other end of the drawing-room. The wounded man was laid on it.

Susan sent Irene out of the room.

Like the greater part of country priests the Curé had some notions of surgery. Maubray was undressed. His shirt was cut open in the back; his wound was then seen. The knife had penetrated deeply between the shoulders.

After having been washed carefully, a first bandage was put on to stop the bleeding.

The wounded man was insensible. A faint breath scarcely escaped his lips ; he was deadly pale.

“ What can be done ? ” asked Susan of the old Curé, whom she had been courageously assisting.

“ Wait and pray ! ” was his answer.

Two hours at least were necessary to go to the village and return from it. Heaven knows how the Marquis was hurrying on. Poor Bayard had never been driven at such a rate.

Arrived at the doctor's house, the Marquis knocked at the door.

A servant opened it.

“ Is your master at home ? ”

“ No, sir. He was fetched just now for an accident.”

“ Far from here ? ”

“ At the other end of the street. Out there.”

She showed him a group of men, lighted by lanterns.

The Marquis hastened on in that direction.



CHAPTER XXXI.

THE GENDARME'S HORSE.

WE left Thillard flying after his murderous attack. He ran on, mad with terror, thinking only of getting away, and not even noticing the road he was following.

After running for some time, he became more calm, reflected a few moments, and then consulted his watch.

The moon, which now shone brightly, showed him that it was past ten o'clock. The express to Paris passed at a quarter to twelve. The terminus was on the other side of the village, at least three leagues distance. Without a horse it would be utterly impossible for him to be there in time.

Thillard could have got one from the Château, but then he must show himself, and that made him hesitate. Suddenly, at no

very great distance, he heard a horse neighing.

“I am saved now,” thought he, running to the spot from whence the noise proceeded. Guided by the light of the moon, he saw one looking over the barrier, as if he wished to get out.

He entered the enclosure by passing between the bars of the gate, and seized the horse by the mane. It had a halter. With the thong, Thillard soon made a bit and a bridle. Then striding across the animal, he opened the gate. Jupiter, for it was the Gendarme's horse, bounced outside, and started at full gallop.

“Good!” thought he, “it requires no coaxing. Nothing to do now but guide it in the right way.” When they got on the road, it was scarcely necessary to use the bridle. The horse took of itself the road leading to the village.

It was also that of the terminus.

“Bravo!” thought the murderer, “we shall be in advance. So much the better!

I am in haste to get away. A kilometre before the terminus I will leave my horse. I shall be less remarked. But how the good animal runs. One would fancy it to be in as great a hurry as myself!"

Jupiter continued galloping.

Now and then it neighed, but it certainly was with joy.

Thillard was just as pleased. He constantly felt his pocket to make sure he had not lost his prize—he pressed it passionately, saying—

"It is mine! all mine. It cannot be taken from me! My success is certain! I will not stop in Paris. I will take the train to Havre at once. At Havre the steamer for London. Hurrah! I had calculated everything, I have my passport with me—and fortune!"

In less than three quarters of an hour, Jupiter reached the banks of the river. Thillard saw the village, he wished to avoid it, and take a cross road; he had plenty of time to do so.

But now the horse became obstinate. It was in vain for his rider to pull the bridle, he turned round and round, and refused to leave the high road. A fatal idea crossed the murderer's mind. He had kept his knife, holding it by the blade, he hit the horse on the head with the handle. Jupiter snorted with pain and anger. The blow had been given on the half-healed wound caused by the poacher's ball.

He once more darted at full speed towards the village.

Just at that moment eleven o'clock struck.

"Everybody is asleep! and we shall pass like lightning! It does not matter, after all it is the shortest way!"

The pavement of the high street resounded under the horse's hoofs. By the light of the lamp, Thillard saw the flag floating over the gate of the Gendarmerie.

He shuddered, held down his head, and wishing to increase his horse's speed, he made use of the point of his dagger.

Another moment and he would be safe,—

when Jupiter stopped short, and Thillard, taken unawares, bounded over the horse's head, and was thrown against the wall.

Jupiter began neighing most triumphantly. Almost immediately in the front of the building a lighted window was opened.

“Who is there?”

Jupiter answered in his language.

“By gad!” said the Brigadier, “it is my horse!”

And followed by one of his comrades, he came down to open the door. Jupiter walked in, quite proud of his exploits.

“Here you are again!” said his master. “But what a race he must have run! he is covered with foam!”

“Except on the saddle part,” observed the other Gendarme, who held the light. “Jupiter did not return alone, he must have been ridden by some one.”

“What would have become of the rider?”

“Let us look outside,” proposed his companion.

At their very first step, they perceived a

man, lying at the foot of the wall, with his face on the pavement.

The two Gendarmes hastened to lift him up.

His skull was broken, his face crushed to pieces, and covered with blood.

"The poor devil is paid off!" said the soldier. "He died on the spot."

"Never mind! go and fetch the Doctor."

A few minutes later the Doctor arrived, followed by Pierre Morisseau, who was at his house.

All the inhabitants of the barracks were assembled, the wives of the Gendarmes had come out, a few neighbours, roused by the noise, had mixed with the group.

The Doctor saw at once that no help could be given. The man was quite dead.

"Can any one tell me who this unfortunate man is?" asked the magistrate.

The lookers on came by turns to see him.

His face, frightfully disfigured, was one mass of blood and wounds.

The Doctor asked for water and a sponge.

Every one, leaning over him, tried to recollect in the corpse lying before them some feature or mark by which they might recognise him.

At last one of the waiters at the *café* said—

“It is the steward of the Château de Navailles—it is Thillard.”

“So it is, I think,” said M. Morisseau, “but how?”

He made them relate the details of what had just happened.

“Look in his clothes,” he then ordered, “perhaps we may discover some proof, some sign.”

He entered the barracks, while the Gendarmes searched the body. They soon came in, bringing a passport and a pocket book.

The Magistrate seated himself before a table, having the Doctor and the Brigadier opposite to him.

The passport bore Thillard's name, the only indication as to his identity.

The sum contained in the pocket book was a ray of light.

“Have we discovered a robbery?” exclaimed M. Morisseau.

“Yes, as well as a murder,” answered a voice behind him.

It was that of the Marquis, who had passed through the crowd.

“To-night,” added he, “M. Maubray has been waylaid and murdered in the neighbourhood of the Manor. He is dying, in my house. Doctor, I came to fetch you; we must not lose an instant.”

“I will go with you,” said Morisseau; “it is my duty. You will follow us, will you not, Brigadier?”

“Immediately; for we shall find at the gate of the enclosure traces of the murderer. He must have taken my horse from there. Only think it was he, it was Jupiter, who brought him straight to the Gendarmerie! Is he not a true Gendarme’s horse?”





CHAPTER XXXII.

MARRIAGE IN EXTREMIS.

MAUBRAY had not recovered from his swoon when the Doctor arrived. He examined the wound, and it was with a gesture of despair that he answered the enquiring looks about him.

“Is there no hope left?” asked the Marquis.

“God sometimes accomplishes miracles,” replied the Doctor.

Susan, kneeling near them, was praying and crying.

At dawn only, the dying man came to himself. A cordial he had taken had given him a little strength. His eyes wandered in search of Susan, and she came to him. He said in a scarcely audible voice—

“Tell the Marquis I wish to speak to him—to him alone—and to you.”

She did as he wished.

The astonished Marquis begged of the *curé* and of the Doctor to go into the next room.

During that time Maubray had said to Susan—

“My fortune is Bernard’s. But I should like to leave him my name also. Do you consent? Nothing ought to be refused to dying people.”

The Marquis now appeared, and bent over him to hear what he had to say.

In a stronger voice, he continued—

“Marquis, I am the guilty man who forsook Susan. I am Bernard’s father. God led me here. He grants me an hour of respite, that I may repair the evil that I have done, by a marriage *in extremis*. Will you allow it to be performed in your house?”

The old gentleman’s answer could be read in his eyes. He held out his hand to Maubray.

“But how is it to be done?” resumed the latter; “I do not know, and the time is very short.”

“M. Morisseau is here,” said the Marquis

de Navailles. "He knows the law. I will question him. He knows the law."

Five minutes after he returned, bringing the Magistrate with him.

Morisseau took Maubray's, Susan's, and Bernard's names and went to the Maire of the village, promising to return as quickly as possible with the Acts.

"The priest is here," said the Marquis.

Maubray thanked him. Then, turning to the Doctor, who had just come in, he said—

"Doctor, pray keep me alive till then."

"Be calm," replied the Doctor, "and I will answer for it."

Maubray kept Susan's hand in his, and closed his eyes.

The noise of the carriage entering the court-yard awoke him.

M. Morisseau was followed by the Maire and the schoolmaster, carrying the registry books. The Act, of which Peter Morisseau had given a copy, was transcribed in them.

While this was being done, the Magistrate questioned the wounded man.

“ I must,” said he, “ in the name of justice, request you will answer me. Look at this pocket-book, and tell me if it is yours.”

“ Yes.”

“ It was taken from you last night, was it not, by your murderer? Do not hesitate about answering. He has already paid the penalty due to his crime.”

In a few words he related Thillard's death; and received Maubray's declaration.

The marriage Act was now ready. It legitimated Bernard.

The Maire read it.

Susan and Maubray answered the questions prescribed by law.

The Marquis, the Doctor, P. Morisseau and the schoolmaster signed as witnesses.

Then it was the *curé's* turn.

Nothing can be more sacred or solemn than a marriage *in extremis*.

Maubray, supported by the Doctor, was sitting up, Susan knelt near him, while the priest blessed them both.

By the laws of God and man they were united ; Bernard was their son.

The dying man then begged of the Marquis to grant him another audience.

“ Bernard is my heir,” said he. “ Permit me now to ask of you, for him, the hand of Mdlle. de Navailles.”

The astonished gentleman looked at Susan. Then a thought flashed across his mind.

“ Wait,” said he to Maubray ; “ Irene shall answer you herself.”

He went to fetch her. No doubt her grandfather had informed her of all, for when she came into the room, when he looked at her with anguish, she went and knelt near him, and looking at him steadfastly, she said in a voice he alone could hear—

“ Father, I loved him—I love him ! ”

“ Ah ! ” said he, falling back on his pillow, “ now I can die in peace.”





CHAPTER XXXIII.

EPILOGUE.

WERE you now to visit the Château de Navailles you would not recognise it. It is a delightful residence, where animation, joy and happiness reign.

Maubray spends much of his time there. He scarcely remembers his wound.

The estate no longer belongs to him. He gave it to his son as a wedding present.

Bernard is Irene's husband. Susan lives with them constantly, and so does the Marquis.

When Susan or Bernard speaks of gratitude, his answer invariably is this—

“Without you, how could the Star of the Navailles have risen once more? Bernard was Prince Charming!”

The farm has nothing to envy the Château. But it is not the one you knew so well. Mathias and Therese manage that for Anthony, who has ten others besides.

He had his father's house rebuilt, and it is there, on his own land, constantly enlarged by fresh acquisitions, he lives.

Agathe is the most charming and the happiest of farmer's wives. She has three lovely children. When, of an evening, the happy father, returning from the fields, finds his two eldest children playing near her, and the youngest sitting on her knees, to him the scene appears like a picture of Greuze.

Anthony has just been elected *Conseiller général*. He is one of our best agriculturists, and old M. Froment is quite proud of it. He has very little consideration for notaries now.

Claude Guérin is the constant visitor and best friend at the Château. Irene has a son, which every one fondles and spoils, especially the old Marquis.

Whilst speaking to M. Maubray, the child's other grandfather, yesterday, he said proudly—

“He will be called Maubray de Navailles.”

THE END.



1. The first part of the document is a list of names and titles, including the names of the authors and the titles of their works. This list is organized in a structured manner, likely serving as a table of contents or a reference list for the document.



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